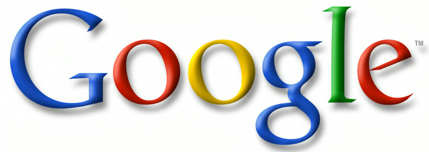

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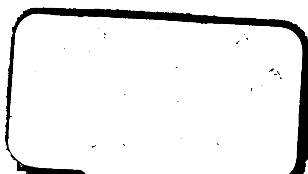

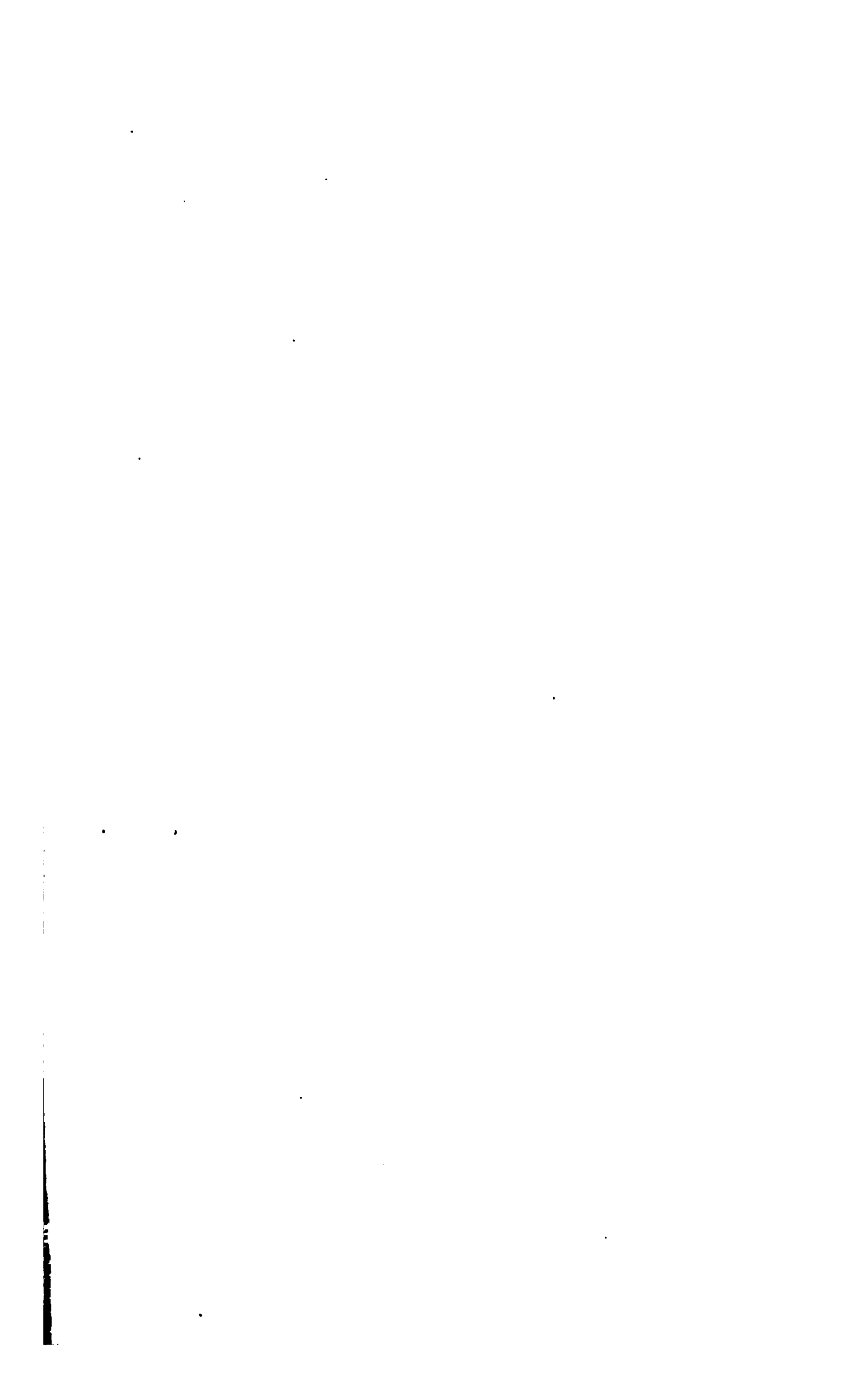

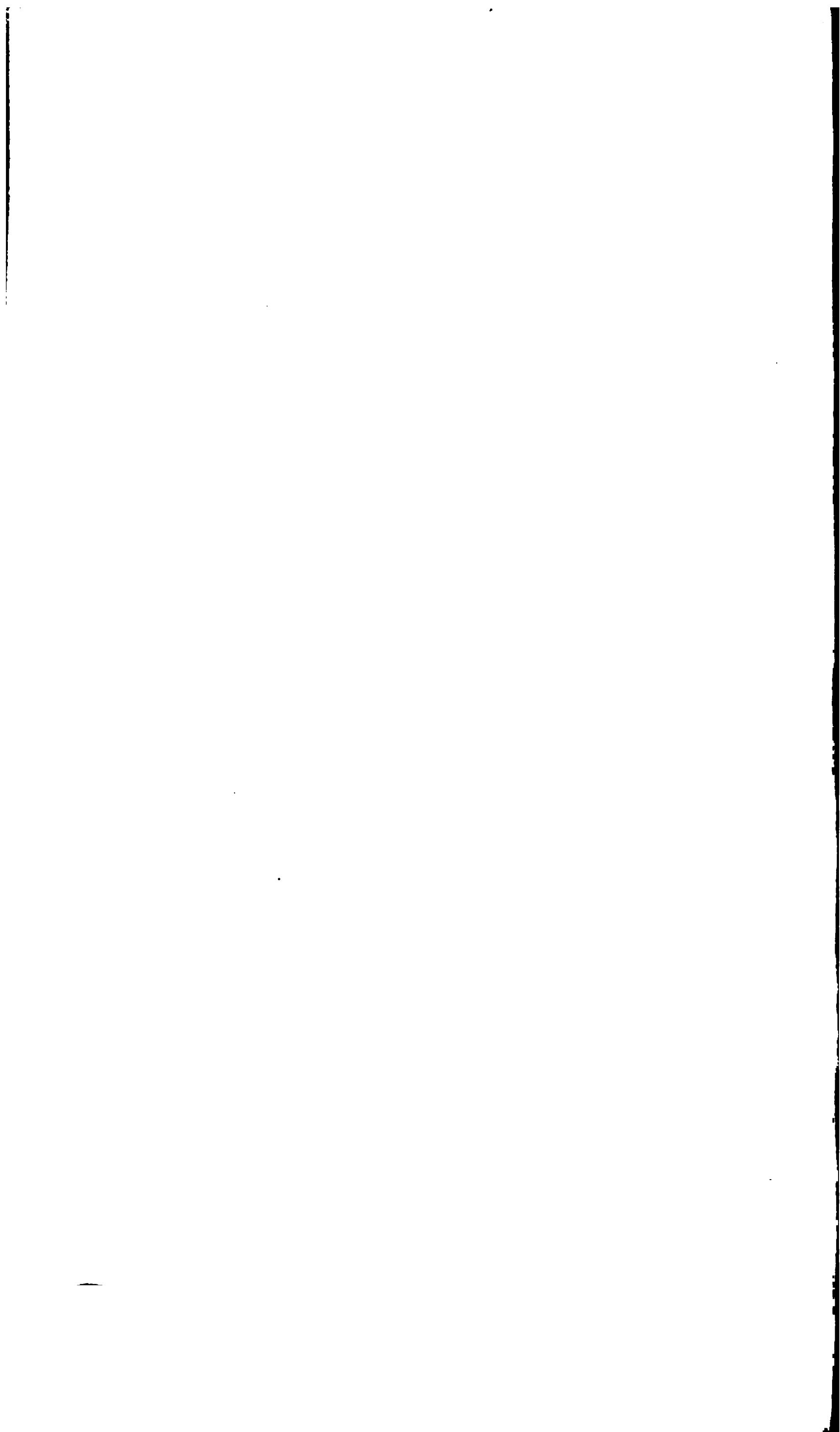

A KEY

TO

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

"Beauty, truth, and rarity,
Grace in all simplicity,
Here inclos'd in cinders lie.

— — — — — — — — —

To this urn let those repair.
That are either true or fair;
For these dead birds sigh a prayer."

SHAKESPEARE.

A KEY

TO

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

BY

D. BARNSTORFF.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

T. J. GRAHAM.

LONDON:
TRÜBNER AND CO.
60, PATERNOSTER ROW, E. C.
1862.

80130

Gift of Annie L. Sears
in memory of her father
Philip H. Sears, Harvard 1844

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PREFACE.

"A KEY to Shakespeare's Sonnets:"—thus I presume to designate this work, and am fully sensible of the significance of the title. I venture to give publicity to my opinion, and boldly claim the honour of being the first to reveal the hidden meaning of a work of the Great Poet's, which has hitherto proved an insoluble riddle to every commentator:—I say an insoluble riddle, for every conjecture that has been advanced, even by men of the highest attainments, appears like the random guess of ignorance when we steadfastly fix our mind upon, and seek to comprehend the spirit of these poetic emanations. Commentators, and critics who had no conception of the pure sphere of thought in which the poet ranged, could only skip over the incomprehensible, and represent as poetic embellishment that licientiousness which existed in their own imaginations alone,—not in the sonnets.

Every inexplicable, or apparently flat or obsolete passage in Shakespeare's poetry, instead of damping our ardour, or weakening our admiration, should spur us on

to profounder explorations into the spirit of it. This is more particularly applicable to the sonnets. In these, the language not being governed by the several individualities, as in the dramas, is so uniform, and so unequivocal, that it is our own fault, if we cannot trace the under current of thought, and follow it into those regions of pure abstraction whence it sprung; — if we cannot understand the poet, but partially, and piecemeal, some of us more, others less, we have only ourselves to blame.

Gervinus in his work upon Shakespeare, reviews the different conjectures that have been published upon the sonnets; and comes to the conclusion that "where the poet is occupied by such deep meditations and feelings, and these emotions of his soul are expressed to a friend in the form of amorous outpourings, such a friend must have truly and corporeally stood by his side." He adds: "the warmth of life animates them; the relations of actual existence also appear from beneath the thin varnish of allegory peculiar to this species of poetry; the healthy pulsation of a heart deeply affected, beats through the envelopements of poetic affectation." This last observation strikingly describes the general impression which is made by the sonnets, apparently over-burthened with words. But for the very reason that an actual and ardent emotion seems to have given rise to the sentiments, our minds rebel against the assumption

that they were addressed to a young man of flesh and blood, or to a woman of light character whose favours the poet enjoyed in common with his friend.

Did not every word of this poetic emanation contain proof, to me overwhelmingly convincing, that something totally opposite was meant; — could I adopt the general and, erroneous view, or even admit that these were the effusions, of a friend or of a lover, based, as in the latter case they must have been upon carnal lust, unworthy of a man, a poet, a Shakespeare; — I would not hesitate, in spite of my unbounded and reverential admiration for the Great Dramatist, to give my verdict as a man that the sonnets are, with all their beauties, inwardly unclean.

The standard by which we measure other master-minds is not sufficient to judge Shakespeare by. Where the wonderful poetry of his diction presents us with truths, emotions, and profound reflections in figurative language; and where, as in the sonnets, every comparison is a symbol, we are much too prone to regard, as poetic embellishment, passages in which the poet was chiefly striving to give the pure thought the most appropriate expression, — the deepest sentiment the most transparent dress. All his beauty is truth! Never, of this I am convinced, did he *seek* the Beautiful, it springs from him so naturally; his ideas, and feelings, blend so innately with the words of the language, with his allegories and

with the plot of his dramas, that where we discover the Beautiful in any work of his we may also expect to find the True.

Who that has perused the Sonnets in a spirit of interested enquiry, under the impression that they were dedicated to a man, — a certain earl, — can say that his attention has been rivetted by a single consoling, or elevating thought; or that his heart has in any degree been affected, or his sympathy caught by that which so deeply moved the poet? Must he not acknowledge that an instinctive feeling of the unmanliness and impropriety of the dedication, made much of the language and sentiment appear flat, and contemptible? The "*distilling*" (Sonnets V—VI) of his young friend, before his beauty fades, what can it mean, what conceivable drift can such a word have, but what is repugnant to sense and sentiment? But how, if by flinging aside this low-minded interpretation, which is justified neither by internal nor external evidence; — how, if by adopting another, higher, purer, nobler, and more intellectual interpretation all and every thing that presented a difficulty to the understanding vanished? — How if the discovery of a single-minded train of thought resolved all the jarring, conflicting details into the most delightful harmony, dispelling at the same time every image that could wound the most delicate moral nature, and spreading over all a brightness and perspicuity

limited only by the degree of intellectual power brought to bear upon the subject by the individual critic?

To point out this single-minded train of ideas, to trace it through all the details of the sonnets, as it might otherwise be overlooked, is the task I have set myself.— To display the highly moral, aesthetical and psychological value of these emanations; and to contribute an effort towards fulfilling Shakespeare's hope that some day his Psyche, freed from her sonnet-film, might unfold her inborn loveliness and perfection to the gaze of all the world — this is my end and aim.

For the full comprehension of the inner meaning of the sonnets an intellectual exertion is indeed necessary. The effort is nothing less than to transpose self into another special individuality. That this is difficult for most men, the fate of the sonnets hitherto proves; but that such an effort was surprisingly easy to Shakespeare is evident by the truthfulness of his dramatic characters. How far my command of language will enable me to guide others, and convey clearly to them the perceptions which have flashed upon my mind, this essay must prove. Let me at least hope that it may serve as a way-mark towards the truth.—He, indeed, who shuns the intellectual labour of studying and analysing this work of the greatest, the most gifted perhaps of human kind,—a work in which, shaking off all the trammels of custom, he soars into regions of the purest

abstraction, and reflects his views in a mirror, the admirable clearness of which borders on the superhuman, — for such a one the sonnets will remain, as heretofore, the feeble effusions of an unhealthy mind.

I have only to hope that my work may meet with an unprejudiced criticism. It has no value, but in its great subject. The most, and doubtless the weightiest objections which can be brought to bear against me in an aesthetical and psychological point of view, I have already made to myself and overcome. In such an argument the plain letter of the poet can alone decide; and this, and this only, must be taken as the touchstone of my explanations. My whole and sole endeavour has been to comprehend Shakespeare by a candid and impartial analysis. To those who, adopting in principle my interpretation, can prove me to be wrong in detail from Shakespeare's own words I shall feel grateful; on the other hand, I ask those who still insist upon the vulgar acceptation to mention out of the one hundred and fifty four Sonnets only three with whose details the carnal interpretation better agrees than my intellectual one.

BREMEN, *November* 1861.

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

How could a doubt prevail in the literary world upon the subject of Shakespeare's Sonnets! How could a vulgar superficial reading of this work so cloud the intellects of thinking men, that they should remain satisfied with interpretations and assumptions, not only unreliable, but which tend to drag the name of the poet in the dirt of the earth.—It has been well said, that when we meet with a passage in any work of a Shakespeare's, that at the first reading appears strange and incomprehensible, we are to ponder over and criticize it with a settled conviction of our own intellectual inferiority,—of our utter insignificance compared with him. We echo this opinion; yet who, unless a mere blind admirer, on reading the sonnets, under the impression that they were addressed to a patron, a friend, or a mistress could help condemning these apparently overstrained and long-drawn verses as devoid of taste, and *true* feeling;—altogether unmanly, and opposed to all elevation of soul? But Shakespeare, the Great Dramatist, was their author, and we have to read carefully and judge timidly. Shakespeare is distinguished for sound sense discretion, and discrimination. His detestation of bombast and

mouthing is plainly shewn in the play of Hamlet. Now is it conceivable that he should have been so false to himself in these sonnets, as *Laertes-like* to prate, and whine, and rant of love,—or that he should waste his genius, and that Time upon which he sets so great a value in fawning, adulatory effusions dedicated to a young man of rank, to a friend, or to a mistress? This struck us as so utterly improbable, that we resolved to fling aside the vulgar acceptation and seek whether some other object more worthy of such an expenditure of time and talent might not be latent in the sonnets. Modestly and almost without the hope of obtaining a satisfactory result, we bent to our task; and discovered — what? darkness? confusion? No! light and order. Every word and every symbol displayed convincingly that the poet had been misunderstood.

We could now hardly comprehend the fact, that men of high attainments should have disputed about the corporeal beings to whom the poet was supposed to have dedicated these poetic emanations. We could still less familiarize ourselves with the flattering circumstance, that it should be reserved for us to perceive and draw aside the veil of allegory with which the poet had so cunningly hid himself. That we should discover in this literary stumbling block against which so many commentators have broken their shins, a literary gem of purest ray serene was more than we could possibly anticipate. Yet such was, as we hope to prove to every reader before he closes this book, the result of our study.

We scarcely know where to commence in proof of that which really requires no proof. We might say with

Winkelmann in reference to the beauties of the Apollo Belvidere: "Go and study the work, and if you do not see its beauty the first time, examine it again, and if you cannot perceive it the second time, go a third time, go again and again till you *feel* it, for be assured it is there." It is indeed altogether a work of supererogation to attempt to render Shakespeare's language plainer than it is of itself. The mists of indifference, the surmises of presumptuous commentators which have hitherto surrounded the sonnets will not endure for a moment the steady penetrating gaze of independent analysis. We need indeed spend no words to prove that which a modest confidence in the poet's genius and good sense, and a careful unbiassed study of his work will render self evident. Nevertheless, experience teaches,—the fate of the sonnets teaches, how hard it is for the most of us to forsake an adopted, or rather imposed error, and disentangle ourselves from the meshes of misconception, and prejudice.

It is always difficult to disassociate ourselves from our environments, and transpose ourselves into the individuality of him we seek to understand. And the fact, that Hamlet, whom we had moving in flesh and blood so to speak before us, proved for a couple of centuries an enigma, may serve as an excuse for the universal misconception regarding a poetic effusion which has its source in regions of the purest abstractness.

The subjects of the poet's muse, in these sonnets is no Earl of Southampton, no Earl of Pembroke, no Queen Elizabeth, no Mrs. Varnon—no corporeal friend, no corporeal mistress, but *Genius* and the *Drama.*

Shakespeare, in these sonnets, holding before his own individuality a mask of allegory, presents to those who will stop to scrutinize, a picture of his innerself. He describes the secret thoughts of his heart;—Firstly in the form of an appeal addressed by his mortal to his immortal man,—his prescribed, external individuality to his innerself,—his intellectual power, his *intellectuality*,—his *genius* (Sonnets I—CXXVI). Secondly by the symbol of a mistress, an outward, mundane love, whose womb his genius is to fructify, he gives us his innermost thoughts upon the Drama or his Art (Sonnets CXXVII—CLII). William Shakespeare, the actor, the lowly, disregarded, uncomprehended man of the age in which he lived, dedicates these verses to his *genius*. Upon this latter is imposed the love-task of raising the former to undying honour and fame among mankind. His genius must triumph over the unfavourable circumstances of birth and fortune,, or, failing to do so, sink like his body into earth and oblivion.

Considered from this point of view, little that is dark or doubtful will be found in the sonnets, and that little may hereafter be proved attributable to the mutilations of superficial and presumptuous critics. In these verses we think may be discovered that which imparted to his works their peculiar originality, their innate logic, and wonderful combination of natural simplicity and poetic beauty. We may also comprehend why he never wasted his time and powers in the invention of the mere plot or fiction, which was to receive the inspirations of his genius. Further, it may be seen in what light he viewed his art and how he expected it would be comprehended

by posterity. All this and much more we have here revealed to the mind's eye in a manner most cunningly devised, and in the only possible form that would afford him perfect freedom of expression and, at the same time, effectually screen him from any uncharitable criticism on the part of his cotemporaries or even succeeding commentators.

In our published observations upon the character of Shakespeare's Hamlet, we directed attention to the fact, hitherto as far as we know, entirely unperceived, that Shakespeare's dramas are, even in their outward show, —even in their very scenery, the embodiment of psychological truths. Now, if we view the most minute, as well as the most striking details, as the offspring of his innerself, begotten through the already prepared plot, or fable;—if we conceive the original story, historical or fictitious, which he selected for the reception of his intellectual images as the feminine attribute, the mistress:— if we can adopt this simple and natural symbol, we may easily comprehend, that for the poet to reveal his mind, it was necessary to divide his two existences,—his intellectual and physical. No allegory could be more apt and convenient than that by which he revealed his most recondite thoughts, and, at the same time shielded his outward self.

In the first half of sonnet XXXIX the poet says this in words sufficiently plain and unequivocal:

> O! how thy worth with manners may I sing
> *When thou art all the better part of me?*
> What can *mine own praise* to *mine own self* bring?
> And what is't but mine own, when I praise thee?

> Even for this let us *divided* live,
> And our dear love lose name of single one,
> That *by this separation* I may give
> That due to thee which thou deserv'st alone.

Although we base our arguments as to the object and sense of the sonnets upon internal evidence, yet we may express our conviction that all the circumstances connected with their origin and publication must appear to every unbiassed mind as favourable to our interpretation. Though what we are about to advance is a mere *supposition,* still it is the most plausible, and indeed the only supposition that has internal and external grounds to support it.

The sonnets are dedicated to a person whose initials were W. H. We venture now to declare that it seems to us very probable, looking at sonnets CXXXV—CXXXVI that these letters stand for the words *William* and *Himself.* As already observed, we have no proof for this, and throw it out simply as a guess. We set no value on it, as far as it relates to our interpretation; for, although offering a certain coincidence, it does not affect it, either one way or the other. It is observable that the dedication in question seems to have been written by the publisher, which we think is contrary to all custom. The publisher terms the unmentioned personage "the only begetter of the ensuing sonnets," and wishes him all the happiness and that *eternity* promised to him therein. In a work containing no name, and consequently giving no fame to any one but the writer himself, there would be no sense in such a dedication, unless it referred to the author, or his genius.

The first legitimate edition of the sonnets was published under circumstances of great mystery. It was made to appear as if the poet himself had not published them. This was, in our opinion, but natural in sending forth a work intended only for posterity, — a work which, if the key to it had been found, would have exposed the author to the taunts of his cotemporaries.

We have only to repeat, in conclusion, that nothing is required but simply to direct attention to the fact, that in these sonnets the poet is occupied, not with beings of flesh and blood, but with his *genius*, the *drama*, and his own *self*; and we might rest satisfied with leaving all further analysis to the unbiassed reader; but we trust that the explanations and transpositions necessary to render our interpretation clear to the German public, may be found useful in enabling the general English reader to arrive with greater facility at an opinion in accordance with our own. The transposition of the poetry into dry prose may be considered by some as altogether superfluous; it will, however, tend to shew how we have been brought to the convictions we entertain. We offer this merely as an essay to dispel the murky mists hanging over a work of the great genius Shakespeare; and with such an object in view we may rely upon the indulgence of all English readers for any errors or short-comings in the effort.

SONNET I.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,
And only herald to the gaudy Spring,
Within thine own but buriest thy content,
And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding.
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

In seeking to comprehend the true *meaning* of Shakespeare's poetical emanations, we must take care not to lower his symbols, the pillars of his poetry, to our own tastes and intellects, but rather believe in the innate purity of his mind, and strive to elevate the symbols and also our own reflective powers to the highest realms of thought! The poet in this sonnet apostrophizes some one thus: "But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes, feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel, making

a famine where abundance lies, thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel. Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament, and only herald to the gaudy Spring, within thine own but buriest thy content, and tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding." Now, we would ask, could Shakespeare, by language like this, have aught else in view than intellectual powers, than the waste, the fallowness, the self-consuming of noble, intellectual qualities? And when he speaks of beauty, what can it be but beauty of the mind? This unnamed being whom Shakespeare calls "only herald to the gaudy Spring," i. e. the precursor of a more lovely, perhaps a maturer, fruitful literature;—this being whom he implores to take pity on the world, on the mundane, not to withhold what is due to the life in which it has been planted, not to go down to the grave with the body without leaving an offspring to inherit its remembrance, to propagate an existence which belongs to mankind,—can, surely be no other than the poet himself, his genius, the creative principle of his own mind? Could language like this be, with a shadow of that truthfulness generally claimed for these sonnets, addressed to a *person?*

Need such single-minded enthusiasm at his own intellectual exuberance, or "beauty," appear so strange in a man whose writings display a most philosophical superiority to personal or party bias, that we should, as of necessity, reduce the splendid symbols through which he opens his heart to us, to a mere material, and even disgusting connexion? Is it then impossible to regard it as an emanation of that same stern cast as the dramas, wherein the poet scourges all sham, cant, arrogance,

and self-delusion, may we not look upon it as an outpouring of the same all-permeating truthfulness which is to be traced in every one of his works?

Let us suppose Shakespeare in his original lowly, straitened circumstances,—let us imagine his gigantic thoughts fretting and chafing in his soul, rising and subsiding; overwhelming and effacing one another like billows of the ocean rolling ever onwards to spend themselves at last on cheerless barren rocks. That a Shakespeare is born, not bred, is understood; it is harder to adopt a true conception of the tremendous barrier which custom, circumstances, and unappreciating friends opposed to the developement, nay even to the dawning of such a genius. The finer, the more sublime the endowment,—the more timidly it ventures to shew itself, so much the easier is it hurt, and driven to retreat within itself. When we view his godlike reason "fusting unus'd in him" for want of every opportunity to mould, to develope itself in the world of men; when we consider the pure primary powers of his *ego*,—the tremendous yearning to create, still in its entire abstractive state in him,—awaiting, as it were, a womb to shape itself;—how human, how true to nature, how morally pure do these excitations of his inner-self,—his *ego* appear!—How frankly, how seriously he here exhorts himself! These verses are a proof, how near mankind were to losing, in the grave, that of Shakespeare which is now the heritage of generations. The assertion that genius overcomes all difficulties, is nothing more than an assertion.

SONNET II.

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now,
Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held;
Then, being ask'd where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say, within thine own deep-sunken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer—"This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse,—"
Proving his beauty by succession thine.
This were to be new made, when thou art old,
And see thy blood warm, when thou feel'st it cold.

How plainly here the poet speaks! In the enormous plenitude of his conceptions which have not as yet found a human sphere to vent themselves, the thought occupies him that his mind as well as his body will grow old, that the exuberance, or beauty, of his intellect, now gazed on with so much admiration, the youthful freshness of his intellectual powers, which now afford him such delight, will gradually decay, some day cease to be, and that, in the field of his intellectual beauty, time will dig deep trenches. If he should then be asked where all his beauty lies, where all the treasure of his lusty days, and he be forced to reply that they were in his own, then, deep-sunken (mind's) eyes, it would be an all-devouring shame, and thriftless praise. But, how much the more would the use of his beauty praise deserve, if he could answer: "This fair child of mine shall sum up my account, and make my old, i. e. late

excuse." He must therefore use his mind's beauty, display it in productions,—he must create,—beget an intellectual child. By this alone can he be represented in after ages. The beauty of his creations will be pointed out by posterity as belonging to him.*

How delightful the consolatory reflection, that even when his intellect grew aged, when the enthusiasm of youth, his intellectual blood became cold, he could still contemplate in his creations the glowing ardour of his prime!

SONNET III.

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest,
Now is the time that face should form another;
Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest,
Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some mother.
For where is she so fair, whose un-ear'd womb
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
Or who is he so fond, will be the tomb
Of his self-love, to stop posterity?
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime:
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
But if thou live, remember'd not to be,
Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

Recognize thyself in the mirror of thine own truthfulness;—exclaims Shakespeare to his inner being.—Acknowledge the admirable beauty of thine *ego:*—Thou beguilest the world, mankind; a mother (Art) is deprived by thee of an effective, abundant fructification,

* That these would be dramas, he could at this period, hardly know.

if thou give not from thee thy imaginings, if thou permit thy intellectual essence to pass away. What sphere of human activity, what province of science, or of art would have been too high to be mastered by his capacities? His mother's (Nature's) glass is his genius:— In that she calls back the lovely April of her prime. And when the bright eyes of thy youth shall have become glazed *(this may refer to the classic period of Grecian literature and art)*;—then wilt thou be enabled to see in thy works this thy golden time.—But if thou live without the ambition of being remembered,—die unwedded (to Art) and thine image (thine imaginings) will die with thee.

SONNET IV.

UNTHRIFTY loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?
Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend;
And being frank, she lends to those are free.
Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse
The bounteous largess given thee to give?
Profitless usurer, why dost thou use
So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live?
For, having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone,
What acceptable audit canst thou leave?
  Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
  Which, used, lives th' executor to be.

How like the monologue of Hamlet! That which the favour of nature has planted in us is not there, to be buried and unemployed,—hoared like a miser's treasure. It is, as a germ, to amalgamate with other parts, it is

to step forth into the world by means of the form which it obtains therein, and prove its beauty by deeds.—It was not for the sake of the man "Shakespeare" that Nature, in his creation, lavished her choicest gifts upon his individual self; he was merely the instrument through which she would have them imparted to mankind. As generous as she has been to him, he must now be to the world. His "unthrifty loveliness," the intellectual loan, which, unused, was hastening with him into the grave, would, if moulded into shape and brought forth, live for ever and be his representative to all posterity.—How far-reaching is this allegory! How dead, and dry, in spite of the florid language would it remain, if applied to the corporeal beauty of a friend who is besought to transfer it by procreation to his,—possible,—children!

SONNET V.

THOSE hours, that with gentle work did frame
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,
Will play the tyrants to the very same,
And that unfair, which fairly doth excel:
For never-resting time leads summer on
To hideous winter, and confounds him there;
Sap check'd with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,
Beauty o'er-snow'd and bareness every where:
Then, were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:
  But flowers distill'd though they with winter meet,
  Lose but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

THE same hours that with gentle work framed an intellectual essence,—a genius like his, whose loveliness

enthralls every eye* will prove its destruction, will render that ugly or unfair which they tended to form into beauty.—Never-resting time leads summer on to winter; all saps are checked by the frost of age, the strong green leaves are gone, beauty over-snowed, and bareness every-where.—But, in vessels of glass, the spirit, the essence of the summer is preserved, the odour of the rose, the aroma of the grape; without this, all would pass away and be lost for ever; but while these essences, these odours, these internal, invisible beauties have been distilled and conserved, so as to be used and remembered, only the externals, the show, the dress, the corporeal beauty of the summer are dead and gone.—To refer this figurative language to any other being than Shakespeare himself,—than to the intellectual essence of his own individuality, which he incites himself to conserve for posterity in crystal vessels (his works, his dramas)—would make the sonnet poor and watery in thought and effect. True it is, that no man but a Shakespeare could speak thus; to him alone, who still lives in his works, could this allegory apply; true it is also, that only he who perceives the poet "living, moving, and having his being" in the creatures of his dramas can thoroughly appreciate it. What in any other man would be eccentric exaggeration, is here pure truth. We must place ourselves in the exceptional position of

* It will be observed that in the strictly consistent symbols of the sonnets in which Shakespeare moves more and more freely, the word "eye" is always employed for *mind*, *intelligence* in contradistinction to heart, which is ever used for *feeling* or *sentiment*. These two qualities of the soul are regarded by the poet, as being the one masculine, the other feminine.

the poet; we must view him at a height far above the usual human standard; and we may then discover in our own hearts sentiments similar to those expressed in the above sonnet, though of a lower, and more limited order than Shakespeare's. Such reflection and self-study will enable us to sympathise with the truly human desire of the poet, that the beauty with which he had been gifted, might not dissolve into nothingness together with his mortal man, but spread its fragancy to posterity. What should we have known of Shakespeare, had he not overcome the difficulties which, at the time he wrote this sonnet, probably obstructed his progress?

SONNET VI.

THEN, let not winter's rugged hand deface
In thee thy summer, ere thou be distill'd:
Make sweet some phial; treasure thou some place
With beauty's treasure, ere it be self-kill'd.
That use is not forbidden usury,
Which happies those that pay the willing loan;
That's for thyself to breed another thee,
Or ten times happier, be it ten for one:
Ten times thyself were happier than thou art,
If ten of thine ten times refigur'd thee.
Then what could death do if thou shouldst depart,
Leaving thee living in posterity?
Be not self-will'd, for thou art much too fair
To be death's conquest, and make worms thine heir.

LET not — exclaims Shakespeare to himself — let not — the omnipotent wheel of time crush the flower of thy inner-being ere its odour be extracted. Invent an outlet for the glorious abilities still unaffected by

the friction and trouble and bustle of the world, — for those intellectual powers not yet confused by, or spread over many branches of learning; for the admirable loveliness of thy mind find a mirror. It is a lawful usury if thou receive ten-fold the fruit of truth, with which thou hast impregnated the Drama. The alternative presents itself to the poet in all its hard seriousness; — either surrender his whole being a prey to the worms, or by preserving it in a vessel (Dramatic Art), permit it to acquire an existence for others; to create another *ego* which should save from perishing, with his body, the multifarious emotions of his mind, and preserve him to posterity by ten representatives intead of only one. — His creations, his intellectual offspring, his dramas, which perhaps now began to rise before him in shadowy outlines, should be a repetition of his own self, should refigure his innermost being from generation to generation, "leaving him living" unconquered by death. In this idea of the poet's we may discover something of that atonement, the absence of which is notable in the heavy blows dealt by him in Hamlet to all outward deeds and springs of action.—We would refer the reader to the churchyard scene: — the point of view whence this could arise is here shewn to us. — That the preceding sonnets were written before he had framed the plot of any one of his plays is tolerably clear. -- The internal evidence is sufficient to render any external proofs superfluous. The comprehension of the sonnets will exhibit to us where those which were written previous, terminate, and where those which were added later begin. —

SONNET VII.

Lo! in the orient when the gracious light
Lifts up his burning head, each under-eye
Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,
Serving with looks his sacred majesty:
And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,
Resembling strong youth in his middle age,
Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,
Attending on his golden pilgrimage:
But when from hight-most pitch with weary car,
Like feeble age, he reeleth from the day,
The eyes, 'fore duteous, now converted are
From his low tract, and look another way.
So thou, thyself out-going in thy noon,
Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son.

This allegory is highly poetical in all its simplicity and unaffectedness.—As Gervinus somewhere remarks: "Shakespeare's beauties are hard to interpret to those who do not instinctively feel them." The ethereal inspiration that animates this sonnet, is the emanation of the clearest thought, replete with natural feeling.—Its highest value consists more especially in its giving to emotions of the soul, which abstract language is too feeble to impart, outlines taken from common nature.—The poet is warningly reminded of the lot of many a highly gifted spirit which, in spite of the light and warmth it spread around for a short period, vanished like a meteor never to be thought of more. Notwithstanding the unlimited endowment which enabled him without an effort to create, he exhausts every emblem and comparison to spur himself on to overcome the hindrances which prevent him from communing with mankind,—with all the world,—which bar the way to everlasting fame.—The

poet bewails his inaction in the spirit of Hamlet, where this latter exclaims against his own inability to *speak,* at a moment when every motive presented itself for him to do so; or to *act,* when cause, and will, and strength, and means, almost guided his arm; as also where he goads himself on by the crass example of the player's acting in describing Hecuba's despair,* and of the twenty thousand men of Fortinbras† going to imminent death for a fantasy, and trick of fame.

SONNET VIII.

MUSIC to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy.
Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not gladly,
Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine annoy?
If the true concord of well-tuned sounds,
By unions married, do offend thine ear,
They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds,
In singleness the parts that thou should'st bear.

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* Act. II. Scene II. *Hamlet.*—Monologue at the end of the scene:—

" . . . . Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John a-dreams, unpregnant, of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property, and most dear life,
A damn'd defeat was made."

† Act. IV. Scene IV.

" . . . . I do not know
Why yet I live to say "This thing 's to do;
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
To do 't. Examples, gross as earth, exhort me;
. . . .
. . . . How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason, and my blood,
And let all sleep?

Mark, how one string, sweet husband to another,
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
Resembling sire and child and happy mother,
Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing:
Whose speechless song, being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee,— thou single wilt prove none.

With every fresh sonnet the symbol selected by the poet becomes more and more transparent.—We gain more freedom, boldness and certainty at every fresh step in the retracing of the splendid comparisons to the thoughts from which they originate. The key we have hit upon fits every portal.—By the harmonious concord of well-tuned sounds he is sadly moved: Music which he delights to hear oppresses his soul; it sweetly chides him that he should permit the music of his mind, his thoughts, to be confounded in singleness. This is an incitement to him to make one string sweet husband to another, and of his many solitary beautiful thoughts to form one grand concord by a mutual ordering.—Here we have, perhaps, the clue to the reason why Shakespeare never wrought with self-invented plots, and why his gigantic intellect to be productive, required a fruitful womb:—The noble essence of his being would wholly and uselessly have been extinguished, had it not, like the tones of music, found strings or subjects with which it could unite in concord.—

SONNET IX.

Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye,
That thou consum'st thyself in single life?
Ah! if thou issueless shalt hap to die,
The world will wail thee, like a makeless wife;

The world will be thy widow, and still weep,
That thou no form of thee hast left behind,
When every private widow well may keep,
By children's eyes, her husband's shape in mind.
Look, what an unthrift in the world doth spend,
Shifts but his place, for still the world enjoys it;
But beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
And, kept unus'd, the user so destroys it.
No love toward others in that bosom sits,
That on himself such murderous shame commits.

The world, mankind would weep as thy widow if thou left no issue (of thy intellect) behind thee. The money which a prodigal misspends is not lost to the world; it merely changes hands; but the waste of intellectual wealth hath in the world an end; and being kept unused, the user so destroys it. No love towards others dwells in a mind that murders itself by permitting its instructive and delighting powers to run to waste.— Were it not our intention to leave unargued the opinion entertained of these sonnets being addressed to a corporeal friend— as every line protests against such an assumption — we might here dwell upon the contradistinction which the poet makes between the widow of the being he sings, and "every *private* widow:" The world will be thy widow, and in stillness weep that thou no form of thee hast left behind, when every *private* widow may keep *her* husband's shape in mind by children's eyes. – Here is a plain distinction made by Shakespeare himself; and we leave it without further comment to the unprejudiced reflection of the reader.— What material or intellectual self-murder which would, without boundless exaggeration, have rendered the world

a widow could he commit unless upon his own genius? *Where is his equal?* What mortal stands so utterly beyond all compare as he? Centuries have come and gone, but have they produced an intelligence (at least in the same province) that can in any degree be compared to his? He dedicated his dramas, not to his age, but to posterity, —to later generations;—and, as we maintained in our work upon Hamlet, the proof lies in the contents of these sonnets. The world would undoubtedly have suffered a loss had it been deprived of his dramas. The stage of that period made use of his plays, just as the theatre of our own time does, because their outward dress, their show and action are the *best* we have for representation.

SONNET X.

FOR shame! deny that thou bear'st love to any,
Who for thyself art so unprovident.
Grant, if thou wilt, thou art belov'd of many,
But that thou none lov'st is most evident;
For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate,
That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire,
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate,
Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind!
Shall hate be fairer lodg'd than gentle love?
Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
Or to thyself, at least, kind-hearted prove:
  Make thee another self, for love of me,
  That beauty still may live in thine or thee.

WHEN we transfer the ban under which Hamlet groaned, his helplessness in word and deed, as a grand psychological element in its widest acceptation, to Shake-

speare himself, and extend the analogy to the highest regions of his reflective powers; for a root, positive, or negative, in the poet himself, this peculiarity must have, or it could not have remained for centuries a riddle, in spite of the clearest eviction, the meaning of this sonnet becomes at once evident. This conjuring up before his spirit of every image that could tend to encourage him in the subjugation of that which thwarted and enthralled him is something so human and so true,—the abstraction of the pure thought is represented to us in such pithy symbols, that we lift up our eyes with wonder at a poetic emanation, which the absolute analysis itself hardly equals in clearness.

It will be seen from the foregoing in what light we consider the affinity existing between the poet and his creations. It is purely psychological. He bases every separate drama upon a particular phase of his own character, as psychological element, as moulding or shaping principle; and variously as it may be developed in the several persons, and to no matter how many individualities it may give life, in the course of the plot, and although it may sink into the lowest depths, in its contortions and distortions of character, and, herein, by its exaggeration, lose all resemblance with its original, yet, that which he represented to us as human nature is, and remains, his own inmost being.

SONNET XI.

As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou growest
In one of thine, from that which thou departest;
And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestowest,

Thou may'st call thine, when thou from youth convertest.
Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase;
Without this, folly, age, and cold decay:
If all were minded so, the times should cease,
And threescore year would make the world away.
Let those whom nature hath not made for store,
Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish:
Look, whom she best endow'd, she gave the more;
Which bounteous gift thou should'st in bounty cherish.
She carv'd thee for her seal, and meant thereby,
Thou should'st print more, not let that copy die.

In the true chasteness of his mind, Shakespeare does not (nor does he frequently in his dramas) hesitate to employ a figure of thought taken from uncorrupted external nature as the symbol of inward naturalness. The fructifying, intellectual force of his mind will grow as fast in dramas whose feminine part is already prepared, as fast, as it, restrained, will wane and dissolve in its own powers. If thousands whom nature has not intended for the purpose of laying up a store for posterity perish in barrenness, so much the greater reason that he whom she has endowed with such bounteous gifts should honour the distinction by fulfilling her behests. She carved not in vain the poet for her seal, but that he should give true impressions of her in his productions. And what is the stamp that each of his works bears? The image of Nature herself.

How flat, how utterly shocking to all fine feeling, if this and all the sonnets referred to a friend, whom the poet was persuading to marry!

SONNET XII.

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night:
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard;
Then, of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
And die as fast as they see others grow;
And nothing 'gainst time's scythe can make defence,
Save breed, to brave him, when he takes thee hence.

The strokes of the clock, that tells of fleeting time, the hideous night following the cheerful day, the faded violet, the bareness of the lofty trees which formerly afforded shelter to the herds, the summer's green all girded up in sheaves standing in the stubbled field; all and everything in nature reminds him warningly of his transitory stay. In translucent clearness stands the fact before his "mind's eye," that the beauty of his soul, a child of nature, is as fleeting as all the rest, that nothing against time's scythe can make defence, save creations, offspring, — these alone can brave the fell destroyer. How he exhausts every simile, to incite himself to burst the restraints that enthrall him! This is analogous to the ban resting upon Hamlet, the source of which we have endeavoured to trace to the poet himself, and which we pointed out as having its home in the higher realms of thought. The atoning example

of the full and brilliant victory, the conversion of it into the opposite is shewn by the continuation of the sonnets, is shewn by the existence of Shakespeare's dramas which are, in fact, *his* words, *his* deeds, *his* creations, his "*breed*."

SONNET XIII.

O, THAT you were yourself! but, love, you are
No longer yours, than you yourself here live:
Against this coming end you should prepare,
And your sweet semblance to some other give:
So should that beauty which you hold in lease,
Find no determination: then, you were
Yourself again, after yourself's decease,
When your sweet issue your sweet form should bear.
Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
Which husbandry in honour might uphold,
Against the stormy gusts of winter's day,
And barren rage of death's eternal cold?
O! none but unthrifts. Dear my love, you know,
You had a father: let your son say so.

THIS sonnet, too, expresses so plainly the emotions,—the lively, humane sentiments, that fill the poet's soul, when he fixes his clear intellectual gaze, undimmed by any kind of bigotry or religious bias, upon the transitory nature of all things human. When the thought of the dissolution of his own great self occurs to him, he feels the ardent desire to prevent the annihilation (mundanely) of the mind that is working within him. We see that his idea as to the immortality of the soul stretches farther than the traditional or ecclesiastical. He seeks to live for ever in the world by a son, by his

works, which shall say to delighted posterity "Shakespeare was our father." Thou thyself, hadst a father! he exclaims to his inmost being. We may here form an opinion as to his conception of the origin and destination of his genius.

SONNET XIV.

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck,
Ant yet, methinks, I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good, or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain, and wind;
Or say with princes if it shall go well,
By ort predict that I in heaven find:
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And, constant stars, in them I read such art,
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,
If from thyself to store thou wouldst convert;
  Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
  Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

The poet cannot read the stars, and predict good or bad fortune; it is not granted him to prophecy by the heavenly bodies whether it will go well or ill with princes; whether rain or wind, or storms, whether sickness or famine will occur. No, all his knowledge comes from the starlike eyes of his genius, in these he reads all the art, which truth and beauty produce together, and should these eyes be extinguished ere that aught of their brilliancy and loveliness be preserved, it would, he prognosticates, be the doom and date of truth and beauty. Can, we would ask, any other inter-

pretation be given to this, than the one we have adopted? That which would be a prophecy fulfilled, becomes empty prattle by applying it to a corporal being. What is more applicable to Shakespeare's works than Truth and Beauty? Is it not more particularly the perfect harmony of both, that distinguishes the works of Shakespeare from those of every other author, and which renders them unique in their kind? Is it presumption or pure sincerity in a Shakespeare, standing alone as he did, in a world void of all comprehension for his truth and beauties, to perceive the necessity of preserving something of his grand *ego* for the posterity that would appreciate him? In his isolated position, in the absence of every encouragement or appreciation of his worth, is not the thought excusable, but humanly beautiful— that when his genius should be extinguished, it would be the doom and date of truth and beauty upon earth? He also gives a beautiful allegory representing his isolation in a world that did not understand him, in No. XXI of his Passionate Pilgrim which is closely related to the sonnets.

SONNET XV.

When I consider every thing that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment;
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows,
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and check'd even by the selfsame sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;

> Then, the conceit of this inconstant stay
> Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
> Where wasteful time debateth with decay,
> To change your day of youth to sullied night;
> And, all in war with time, for love of you,
> As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

The poet clearly expresses how he thought at the time of life when he composed the preceding sonnets. That these emanations belong to different periods, that they were written before, during, and after the creation of his dramas is so evident from the sense, that all external proofs are superfluous. When this sonnet was composed he had not produced any work, any drama, as "store," to use his own expression, for posterity.—Nay, he appears even to doubt whether he will be able to overcome the difficulties which surround him, whether he will ever succeed in giving birth to any production of his genius. When he perceives that men as plants increase, cheered and checked by the self same sky, vaunt in their youthful sap at height decrease and sink into dust and forgetfulness at last, he resolves, before it be too late, to save his inmost being (which, though spiritual, is still, like every thing else, but of inconstant stay) by engrafting it anew. He will preserve it in his sonnets; for want of something better, these, at least, shall speak for him. We shall see, however, in the following sonnet that the consoling hope which this determination afforded him vanished; and that he encourages himself afresh to create something more effective for the attainment of his great object.

SONNET XVI.

But wherefore do not you a mightier way
Make war upon this bloody tyrant, time,
And fortify yourself in your decay
With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?
Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers,
Much liker than your painted counterfeit:
So should the lines of life that life repair,
Which this, time's pencil, or my pupil pen,
Neither in inward worth, nor outward fair,
Can make you live yourself, in eyes of men.
To give away yourself, keeps yourself still,
And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill.

But how can these verses of mine convey the full beauty and profundity of my inmost being to posterity? By more powerful means, war must be made upon this bloody tyrant *Time!* In more attractive, popularly comprehensive compositions his genius must fortify itself against decay. His rhyme alone would not carry his genius home to the hearts of the world, as his plays have done; they would have proved indeed barren, and have made him known only to the curious few. His whole being must outpour itself in productions. And how many unexplored fields are open, all yearning with virtuous desire to bear the flowers of his genius? What sphere of art would not rejoice in the fructifying power of his mind? The creatures of his own imagination would more resemble him than the picture of himself which he draws in these sonnets. The lifelike lineaments of his inmost being, those creations of his imagination

would represent better than this "time's pencil," or pupil pen (essaying pen – the pen with which he is writing the sonnets) for those, neither by their inward worth, nor outward fair, attractive form, can make you live yourself in the eyes of mankind. By giving away yourself, he exclaims to his innerself, you preserve yourself still, and you must live, genius, drawn by your own sweet skill. Thus then we have to look for Shakespeare himself, his entire individual humanity, in the dramas. Had we not come to this conclusion by our own studies long ago, these words of the poet would have sufficed to convince us.

SONNET XVII.

WHO will believe my verse in time to come,
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts.
If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say, "this poet lies;
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces."
So should my papers, yellow'd with their age,
Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than tongue,
And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage,
And stretched metre of an antique song:
  But were some child of yours alive that time,
  You should live twice—in it, and in my rhyme.

How truly affecting is this sonnet! "Who will believe my verse in times to come, if it were filled with the highest deserts of my genius? And yet, heaven knows, it is but as *a tomb* which *hides* your *life,* (i. e. it de-

ceives the world as to whom I am really addressing) and besides shows not half your parts." And if it were possible for him to describe the beauty of his mind's eyes—the wondrous images of his fancy—and in fresh numbers to number all the graces of his genius, the age to come would say "this poet lies; such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces." Then would his papers, his sonnets, yellowed with their age, be scorned like old men of less truth than tongue, and the rights due to his genius would be termed a poet's rage, the *stretched* metre of an antique song;—just what these sonnets have been hitherto mistaken for.—A most divining look into futurity! Only if some offspring of his shall bear it witness, his genius will live,—live twice,—in his dramas and in his sonnets. That the sonnets would be regarded by posterity as addressed to an amiable young man—that indeed the poet appears not to have foreseen; nor need his shortsightedness in this respect astonish us, for, having left us a monument to his intellect in his noble dramas (which it is our conviction are even now but little understood) he might with good reason imagine that the same posterity would not pronounce him to be a great genius and teacher in his dramas, and an unmeaning, or mere flattering rhymster in his sonnets.

SONNET XVIII.

SHALL I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By change, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, so long will these verses live and give *him* life. The poet in the sonnets always symbolizes the same idea:— Thus, when he subsequently makes a distinction between the eye and the heart of his genius, and we have to understand by the one symbol, the clear perception, and by the other, the deep sentiment, it will be found that he also transfers the signification of these words to passages having no direct reference to his own mind; this will be evident to the reader after he has perused the whole of the sonnets and has mastered the peculiar kind of allegory upon which they are based. Every beauty loses something of its beauty, changes itself or is by nature changed;—but the eternal summer of his mind shall not fade, nor shall death brag that his genius sinks into the grave when he has rendered it immortal in his works. That which, according to our reading, is an inspired view of the future, would become a wearisome wilderness of words if the poet meant not himself, but some friend or mistress. Neither the outward form, nor inner being of any one of his cotemporaries was worthy of such an effort on the part of the poet to hand him or her down to postery.

SONNET XIX.

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-liv'd phoenix in her blood:
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,
To the wide world, and all her fading sweets;
But I forbid the one most heinous crime:
O! carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
Him in thy course untainted do allow,
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
    Yet, do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,
    My love shall in my verse ever live young.

We have here a peep into the poet's world of thought and feeling,—a self analysis such as was never afforded us by any other genius. The seeming arrogance of the mood in which we here discover him vanishes when we reflect that it has been justified by the verdict of posterity. His pride becomes child-like frankness towards the man, where it is expressed to his innerself and after-ages. This mood is so thoroughly human that we may compare it to the contempt of a mother for the opinion of the whole world, as regards herself, and what she may do or seem when her child's life is in danger. Do what thou wilt all devouring time, exterminate all mere earthly things,—make the earth devour its own brood;—do what thou wilt to the wide world and all its fading pleasures, but I forbid thee one most heinous crime: O! carve not lines of age and weakness and decline upon the fair brow of my genius; leave it

untainted in thy course that it may be the pattern of beauty (in the abstract) to all succeeding men (coming generations). This "succeeding men" or coming generations would be sheer trash if the poet did not mean his own intellectual beauty, which he had such an ardent yearning to leave as a pattern for all succeeding ages.

SONNET XX.

A WOMAN's face, with nature's own hand painted,
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false women's fashion:
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue, all hues in his coutrolling,
Which steals men's eyes, and women's souls amazeth;
And for a woman wert thou first created;
Till nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing, to my purpose nothing.
But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine by thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

THE poet here begins to enter upon a more special delineation of his innerself. The sonnets themselves he regards as the vessel in which, failing in other productions, he will immortalize his intellectual man. He has been endowed with all feminine sentiments, all the tenderness and loveliness of woman's nature, without, however, the falseness and inconstancy produced by education and contact with the world. His feminine intellectuality or penetration into the nature of the female character has an eye more bright than theirs, gilding

(idealizing) the object where-upon it gazeth; on the other hand he has all the intellectual hues or stamp of a man, and all these are *under his control.* How applicable is this expression to Shakespeare! Of what poet can it be said with the same truth, that he has all his intellectual powers under his own regulating control? In this consists more particularly his perfect objectiveness, or true divination and delineation of human characteristics. That searching penetration of mankind, that moral dissection of the hearts of both sexes, evinced by Shakespeare in his dramas, denotes a practical experience, a range of observation, a capacity of comprehension, a power of contemplation, in short, an expansiveness of intellectual force and refined gentleness combined, that his duplex mind or concentration in himself of the loveliest qualities of the male and female sexes is easy of conception. The meaning which we should be *obliged* to give to *the last three lines* of this sonnet, by deviating from our intellectual interpretation, appears to us so vulgar, so contemptible, that we should be grieved indeed for the great poet if our argument could be refuted.

SONNET XXI.

So is it not with me, as with that muse
Stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse,
Who heaven itself for ornamenth doth use,
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse;
Making a couplement of proud compare,
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.

O! let me, true in love, but truly write,
And then, believe me, my love is as fair
As any mother's child, though not so bright
As those gold candles fix'd in heaven's air:
  Let them say more that like of hear-say well;
  I will not praise, that purpose not to sell.

IT is not with him as with a poet who is stirred by a painted beauty to his verse, who uses heaven itself for ornament, and transfers all the beauties of nature to her,—comparing her with the sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems, and all things rare that the huge rondure hems. He fears that *his* verse may be taken for such exaggeration; and we should be justified in doing so; indeed we could come to no other conclusion, if the sonnets were addressed to a handsome, amiable young man. Against such an interpretation he would guard himself, and assures us with the most natural frankness, that he finds no pleasure nor will he indulge, in such bombast. The enthusiasm of the feeble mortal for his immortal *ego* is simple truth; his genius is as fair as any mother's child, though not as bright and evident to every eye as the golden lamps of heaven. How applicable this to a Shakespeare, whose intellectual rays are only just beginning, in this later age, to pierce through the dense mists of prejudice, which formerly lowered, and still lower more or less densely, over the whole literary world.

Senseless trees they cannot hear thee,
Ruthless beasts they will not cheer thee;
King Pandion he is dead,
All thy friends are lapp'd in lead.

THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM. XXI.

SONNET XXII.

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate;
For all that beauty that doth cover thee,
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me.
How can I, then, be elder than thou art?
O! therefore, love, be of thyself so wary,
As I, not for myself, but for thee will,
Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.
Presume not on thy heart, when mine is slain;
Thou gav'st me thine, not to give back again.

As long as his inmost being, his genius remains fresh and strong, his glass shall not persuade him that he is growing old; but when his mind decays, when it waxes dull with years, then his outward being will be of no use more, and he shall know his end is near. All the beauty that ornaments his genius, is but the seemly raiment (the benevolence, the true moral tendency) of his heart, which lives in his genius, as that of his genius lives in *him*. *How can he then, when they are in effect but one and the same, be elder or younger?* Their powers decline consequently in equal proportion; and therefore, love, be of thyself so wary, as I, not for myself, but for thee will be. I will keep thy heart so chary as tender nurse her babe from faring ill. What a touching comparison, when referred to the inward man, and outward man! Do not imagine that when I am

once dead, thou cans't live to posterity otherwise than in these my verses, or in thine own offspring—thy productions. One corporeal friend could, we should think, outlive an other! As an allegory, this sonnet is very beautiful; but taken as an address to an Earl of Southampton, or a Mrs. Varnon, it is a pretty nonsense-verse,—nothing more.

SONNET XXIII.

As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;
So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'er-charg'd with burden of mine own love's might.
O! let my books be, then, the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
Who plead for love, and look for recompence,
More than that tongue that more hath more express'd.
O! learn to read what silent love hath writ:
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

This sonnet appears at first somewhat more abstruse than the preceding; yet it is dictated by a longing equally true to human nature. Let us for a moment leave Shakespeare, and enter upon the reality. What man, that is endowed by nature with any degree of talent, does not burn with the desire to make himself heard and felt? Imagine then a Shakespeare! His enthusiasm for his own innerself, which was, at the same time, by

no means incompatible with the purest modesty and the most self-searching candour, could it be exhibited to the world otherwise than by an allegory, without exciting mockery and condemnation? Would any of his cotemporaries or associates have been able to comprehend him? Even posterity did not appreciate the sonnets, notwithstanding the universally acknowledged grandeur and beauty of his dramas! He could think of no safer way of unburthening his o'er-charged soul than by committing his secret thoughts to paper, in the form of an allegory,— "the dumb presager of his speaking breast." Had he uttered his sentiments freely and openly, and ventured to make his gigantic intellectual ability felt and acknowledged by his contemporaries, would not the enthusiasm, arising from the most intimate conviction of his power, have caused him to appear like an imperfect actor on the stage, who with his fear is put besides his part? Therefore let his books be the eloquence and dumb presagers of his speaking breast. We must learn to read in these sonnets, what silent love has writ. To *hear* with *eyes* belongs to love's fine wit.

SONNET XXIV.

Mine eye hath play'd the painter, and hath steel'd
Thy beauty's form in table of my heart:
My body is the frame wherein 't is held,
And perspective it is best painter's art;
For through the painter must you see his skill,
To find where your true image pictur'd lies;
Which in my bosom's shop is hanging still,
That hath his windows glazed with thine eyes.

Now, see what good turns eyes for eyes have done:
Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine for me
Are windows to my breast, where-through the sun
Delights to peep, to gaze therein on thee;
Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art,
They draw but what they see, know not the heart.

It is indeed necessary to have mastered fully the symbols selected by Shakespeare, to distinguish between that part of his being which speaks, and that which is addressed, and to keep them quite distinct. Although it may be difficult, for those who are unused to metaphysical studies, to follow the poet to the full extent of his allegory, it is, we think, no less difficult for them to comprehend the sonnets according to the vulgar reading. We, for our part at least, cannot (adopting such a material interpretation) make head nor tail of this exchange of eyes, in the words: "Thine eyes are for me the windows to my breast;" and: "Your true image is hanging in my bosom's shop, that hath his windows glazed with thine eyes." This mutual action, and amalgamation can only possibly apply to the two parts of his own nature. The eyes of his intellectual man, the extreme of penetration with which he is gifted, are also the windows of his breast, allowing him to perceive the baser, human part of his being. Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art, they draw but what they see, know not the heart?

SONNET XXV.

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars.
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.
Great prince's favourites their fair leaves spread,
But as the marigold at the sun's eye;
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories, once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd:
  Then, happy I, that love and am beloved,
  Where I may not remove, nor be removed.

The profound abstractness of the last sonnet is here followed by language plain enough to all who have ever communed with their own hearts. Let those who are in favour with their stars, of public honour and proud titles boast, whilst I, unregarded, delight in what I honour most. Great princes' favourites are but as the marigold at the sun's eye; one frown, and they in their glory die.—Even the warrior celebrated for a thousand victories, once foiled, is erased from the book of fame, and all the rest forgot for which he toiled. *But he* (Shakespeare) *does not depend upon the temper of any mortal, nor upon the favour of fortune.* He is happy that he loves and is beloved, where he may not remove, nor be removed. Read in our sense, this sonnet goes home to every heart. The poet says here expressly that fortune had denied him any public honour. He was evidently not insensible to his hard fate; for

we see that his sorrow, at standing alone and uncomprehended in the world, oozes out, from time to time, in these sonnets; but still he can feel superior to it. The reflection that his genius is peculiarly his own, enables him to view with indifference the superficial respect of men, and those high-sounding distinctions which are, for so many, the chief object of life.

SONNET XXVI.

LORD of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
To thee I send this written embassage,
To witness duty, not to show my wit:
Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it,
But that I hope some good conceit of thine
In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it;
Till whatsoever star that guides my moving,
Points on me graciously with fair aspect,
And puts apparel on my tattered loving,
To show me worthy of thy sweet respect:
Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
Till then, not show my head where thou may'st prove me.

WE may hereby conclude that, at this period, Shakespeare had not written any of his dramas; at least none of those (if he makes a distinction) which are to be regarded as his children,—the resemblances of his inmost being. The mood which he displays here, within the sphere of his allegory, is plain enough; but what has hitherto so puzzled the world is, doubtless, the apparently effeminate fondness expressed towards the supposed friend; and what will puzzle most in our reading

is, the originality, the strangeness of the subject, the metaphysical separation of his spiritual from his intellectual man, and his philosophical selfpraise and self-encouragement. Let us still, if we will, regard it as *new* and strange, and like a stranger give it welcome. There are more things in heaven and earth, and in a Shakespeare too, than is dreamt of in our philosophy. He has not yet the power of expressing in words the sacred awe with which he is imbued for his genius, and its extraordinary powers, yet he trusts that his genius will kindly accept what is here offered, till some star of fortune that guides his movements, points on him graciously with fair aspect, and enables him to prove his appreciation of his talent — his love for his genius (which is expressed here in simple words) by giving his thoughts an apparel worthy of his sweet respect. This we take to signify that when a favourable chance shall lead him into a new path—permit him to devote himself to the drama, or art in general—he will venture to boast of his love to his genius. Till then, he will not show his head, but preserve a modest silence.

SONNET XXVII.

Weary with toil I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head,
To work my mind, when body's work's expired:
For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:

Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.
Lo! thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

We are inclined to assume, and there exist indeed, no external reasons against the assumption, that the preceding sonnets were composed during the poet's early youth. We may suppose, and it agrees, too, with the little we know of his life, that Shakespeare was born in a sphere where none of those who surrounded him could form a conception of his powers of mind. He passed probably a great part of his youth in the dulling and deadening constriction, peculiar to the petty middling class; and was doubtless forced to gain a living for himself. He speaks of his weary limbs, in contradistinction to the nightly workings of his mind. If the reader has any experience of the influence which straitened circumstances in families exercise upon the career of the members, if he can feel the force of the proverb that no man is a prophet in his own country, and, more especially, not among his own kindred of the bread-getting class, he will be inclined to adopt our conclusion that the poet was, at the time he wrote the foregoing sonnets, gaining his livelihood at some trade, as his own words would seem to imply. At all events, his mind fed upon, and grew by itself, working and waxing in the silent hours of the night, when his genius shewed itself to him in all its beauty and expansiveness. This we trace in all his works. With all the unsullied, full-

grown energy of his innate originality of intellect, he opened to himself, later, more congenial paths, never before trodden.

In thus assuming, upon the sense of this sonnet, at what period of life the work was begun, we venture to go a step further and express an opinion, which will doubtless meet with contradiction, and, perhaps, correction. When we compare the sonnets, which were written at a later period, after, as we presume, he had produced some of his dramas, with the foregoing, it will be found (we at least find) that there is no alteration in the style and diction; a unity of thought and expression reigns throughout the whole, denoting great art, both in finish and allegory; and apparently written at a certain period of life. We could, if the sense permitted it, put one of the earlier compositions in the place of one of the later; nor would it be noticed by any superficial distinction in style or expression. And yet such distinctions are asserted to be evident in the dramas, and hypotheses have been based upon them. We confess to incline rather to the opinion that Shakespeare's language, style, or manner of expression, in all his works, was not, in any way, dependent upon the taste of the age, nor any ruling fashion; but was ever dictated by the pure psychological element of the particular dramas. In Hamlet, for instance, it would not be difficult for us to shew the psychological necessity, every time he changes from verse to prose, and from the elevated to the colloquial.

SONNET XXVIII.

How can I, then, return in happy plight,
That am debarr'd the benefit of rest?
When day's oppression is not eas'd by night,
But day by night, and night by day, oppress'd?
And each, though enemies to either's reign,
Do in consent shake hands to torture me;
The one by toil, the other to complain
How far I toil, still farther off from thee.
I tell the day, to please him thou art bright,
And dost him grace when clouds do blot the heaven:
So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night,
When sparkling stars twire not, thou gild'st the even:
  But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,
  And night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger.

We think the mood here described by Shakespeare is not so unusual a one, but that this inward discontent, this profound anxiety must touch a sympathetic chord in many a breast. He who is endowed with any powers of mind, or depth of sentiment, and is nevertheless bound by the ties of necessitous circumstances to some calling where he can move only in one continuous, monotonous round, will easily and thoroughly *feel* the condition referred to by the poet, i. e. when the only opportunity of communing with his innermost being is afforded him by the darkness of night, while reposing his weary body, when the reflection that his daily occupation, instead of exercising and developing his powers, is tending to deaden them, and to lead him away from his high destination. The more I toil, says the poet the farther I remove myself from thee, my genius! He indeed, who like, let us say a Humboldt, endowed with

great powers intellect, has had his path smoothed for him from his youth upward, will hardly comprehend this frame of mind, the delineation of which offers, perhaps, less poetic charms than the representation of feelings and emotions appertaining more to the outward world than to the innerself of mankind. But for those who, like ourselves, look up to Shakespeare with reverential admiration, the discovery again in him of emotions congenial to our own nature, hitherto perhaps not clear to the eye of our mind, has an inexpressible charm, and moves the inner man, even more than great external misfortune.

SONNET XXIX.

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate:
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

This sonnet has always been delightful reading to us. It is one of those, which, before we had become accustomed to the depths, and the frequently playful intricacy of the thoughts and symbols, appeared clearest

to us on our first superficial studies of these sonnets. What beautiful, truthful, and thoroughly human consolation is wafted to us herein! How sweet it sounds from Shakespeare's lips! The mundane troubles, the disfavour of fortune and of men, his intellectual loneliness, his mundane desire to be like one more rich in hope, to be *possessed of friends* with whom he could commune, his envy of this man's art, and that man's scope, i. e. an opportunity to prove his abilities to the world; yet, despising himself almost at discovering such petty thoughts, he fortunately bethinks himself of his genius, and, like the lark at break of day arising from sullen earth, he sings hymns at heaven's gate. For the remembrance of his genius such wealth brings, that then he scorns to change his state with kings.

SONNET XXX.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon of remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then, can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan th' expence of many a vanish'd sight.
Then, can I grieve at grievances fore-gone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay, as if not paid before:
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end.

These emotions, so expressive of woe, and which evidently are but the continuation of the foregoing, can be

regarded as truly beautiful and sincere only, if originating in enthusiasm for his own innermost being. If the recollection of his genius enables him to despise the frowns of fortune, and renders him superior to outward honours and outward success, it also consoles him for all losses and sorrows of the heart. When in quiet retirement he surrenders himself to melancholy reminiscences of so many vain efforts, when his old grief at the flight of precious time creeps over his spirits, fresh sorrow overwhelms him for precious friends, fond hopes, possibly religious convictions, hid in death's dateless night. When tears, long dried, begin to flow again, he has but to think on his friend, his genius, and then all losses are restored, and sorrows end.

SONNET XXXI.

Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
Which I by lacking have supposed dead,
And there reigns love, and all love's loving parts,
And all those friends which I thought buried.
How many a holy and obsequious tear
Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye,
As interest of the dead, which now appear
But things remov'd that hidden in thee lie!
Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
Who all their parts of me to thee did give;
That due of many now is thine alone:
  Their images I lov'd I view in thee,
  And thou (all they) hast all the all of me.

A splendid sentiment is expressed in this sonnet, and in a very beautiful way, for him who is able to follow

the poet in the pure element of his allegory. Every beautiful, holy feeling, every pure woe at the surrender of a cherished religious idea or consolatory conviction, has enriched his innermost being, and in this enrichment he finds not alone his comfort, but all and more than he has lost. How many a holy and obsequious tear hath dear religious love stolen from his eye, as tribute to the dead that now appear no longer dead, but only removed to another place. His genius is the grave that has received them all, therein he sees them afresh and all they have all the, whole of him. This "*all they*" as apposition to "*thou*" applied to real corporeal persons, would be mere sound signifying nothing.

SONNET XXXII.

If thou survive my well-contented day,
When that churl death my bones with dust shall cover;
And shalt by fortune once more re-survey
These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,
Compare them with the bettering of the time;
And though they be out-stripp'd by every pen,
Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme,
Exceeded by the height of happier men.
O! then vouchsafe me but this loving thought:
"Had my friend's muse grown with this growing age,
A dearer birth than this his love had brought,
To march in ranks of better equipage:
But since he died, and poets better prove,
Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love."

If thou survive the day when death shall cover my bones with dust, and shall, perchance, once more re-survey these poor rude lines! — exclaims the poet to

the being he is addressing. This must surely refer to another human being, will, doubtless, be the reader's first thought. But a closer study will lead us to a totally different opinion. If these words applied to some mortal friend, this person could, at the utmost, not survive the poet by more then twenty five or thirty years. Now, the poet speaks of a period when every pen will outstrip his, when his rhyme, his verse, his poesy in consequence of the progress in the arts, and by the works of greater men, will be left far behind. In England, towards the end of the sixteenth century, he could hardly have anticipated so vast an improvement of the forms of language, that it would render his style and speech obsolete. He must have had centuries upon centuries in view. How Shakespeare comprehended this possible reperusal of his sonnets, by his own immortal genius, we shall perhaps understand when we have gone through the whole wreath of sonnets, and grasp them in their entirety. At any rate, the circumstance, that we are not capable of following the poet through all the mazes of his profound abstraction, cannot be taken as an argument that we are not on the right track; for every deviation from the way we have chosen will but lead us into a slough.

SONNET XXXIII.

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing the golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchymy;
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,

And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.
Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
But out, alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
  Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
  Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

WITH this number a new series begins which we might term the second period of our poet's soul-life. His genius, his sun which hithertho has fed "its light's flame with self-substantial fuel," which he spurs on to issue from itself, commences now to shine. May not this be the period when the poet began, incognito, to make essay of his powers? Even *he* stumbles here and there; even *he* is now and then forsaken by his genius, and what poet has not experienced similar inconstancy? The high poetry of the allegory, here presented to us, cannot, we think, be appreciated generally to its full extent; but if we could adopt the belief that these symbols were intended for a personal corporeal friend, they would lose all charm for us. While, however, the poet displays the pure thought by means of his symbols drawn from human nature, he brings himself and us into that religious frame of mind, -- that soft, soothed pensive mood which the scenery of nature, as symbol of the eternal *mind*, calls forth in us; and which resembles that pure poetical spirit which animates even an absolutely scientific work like Humboldt's Cosmos. The mood in which we here discover Shakespeare, when the full perception of, and the enthusiasm for his genius

becomes now and then obscured,—as also the consoling simile, that heavenly suns are, likewise, sometimes obscured,—is so natural and comprehensible, that further analysis is unnecessary.

SONNET XXXIV.

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke?
'T' is not enough that through the cloud thou break,
To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak,
That heals the wound, and cures not the disgrace:
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss:
Th' offender's sorrow, lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.
  Ah! but those tears are pearl, which thy love sheds,
  And they are rich and ransom all ill deeds.

None but those who have been in a frame of mind similar, or akin to this, can glean from this symbol, that which, doubtless in positive reality, happened to the poet. The sun of his genius shone so bright,—promised him such a beautiful day,—that he boldly, in full confidence of its continuance, travelled forth, i. e. commenced some intellectual work. But that intellectual light, for whose obscurity he was not prepared, became clouded. Nay, he, may have ventured to publish an essay,—this we throw in as a mere conjecture,—and his outward man may have thereby gained only the mockery, which true originality so often meets with from those who are

familiar with, but inferior to the author. Yet those tears which his inmost being sheds at it, are so rich and sweet to him, that they ransom all ill deeds.

SONNET XXXV.

No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done:
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
All men make faults, and even I in this,
Authorizing thy trespass with compare;
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are:
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense,
Thy adverse party is thy advocate,
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence.
Such civil war is in my love and hate,
That I an accessary needs must be
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

The poet here speaks of a sensual fault of his genius, and keeps within the nature of the symbol selected. He charges *it* with some lapse, he condems *it* and is at the same time *its* defender. How humanlytrue, how applicable to so many contradictions in the life of the soul! What could be the meaning of that sensual lapse of his genius? For the particular case which we are so bold as to point out, the contents of the following sonnets will offer a reason. In some intellectual work he had made too great a sacrifice of inward truth for the sake of the forms of art, the aesthetic. Let us read, in this sense, the above lines. How Shakespeare himself thought upon this point, is best shewn perhaps by the words: "I excuse thy sins more than thy sins are."

SONNET XXXVI.

Let me confess that we two must be twain,
Although our undivided loves are one:
So shall those blots that do with me remain,
Without thy help by me be borne alone.
In our two loves there is but one respect,
Though in our lives a separable spite,
Which though it alter not love's sole effect,
Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight.
I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame:
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name:
But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

The man Shakespeare and his genius must remain two, however indivisible they may be. The imperfections which cleave to the one must not re-act upon the other. A separating gulf must exist in the lives of both, which, if it do not prevent the most intimate communion, yet robs him of sweet hours of delight, in which he occupied himself with his genius alone. If he would write for immediate public recognition and applause, with a view to theatrical success for instance, he would have to give preference to his mundane, rather than to his immortal part,—he would gain the applause of his cotemporaries, but not the high admiration of after ages. Had he not made this sacrifice to his intellect, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Lear* would each have received such a conclusion, as would have pleased and satisfied the instinct of the theatrical public. The horrid deeds in the said plays, which appertain to them as the body to the soul, would

have been omitted; naked humanity, which the poet wished to present to us, would have been dressed in "*tricot.*" He cannot obtain present public honour, without disgracing that genius which is destined for immortality. He dare not even acknowledge his genius in the presence of his friends and acquaintance. This we accept literally. No one in his time would have recognised him for that which he was—and we are, perhaps even now, far from the *true* conception of his genius.—Ridicule and persecution would have been his lot, had he ventured to express openly that which he has confided to posterity in his sonnets. Every particular, that has come down to us of the outward life of the poet, proves, that his greatness was quite unperceived. He consoles himself for this, with the reflection, that the future, real, and abiding fame of his genius will be his: "Thou being mine, mine is thy good report."

SONNET XXXVII.

As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth;
For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
Or any of these all, or all, or more,
Entitled in thy parts do crowned sit,
I make my love engrafted to this store:
So then I am not lame, poor, nor despis'd,
Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give,
That I in thy abundance am suffic'd,
And by a part of all thy glory live.
  Look what is best, that best I wish in thee:
  This wish I have; then, ten times happy me!

SHAKESPEARE looks upon himself, contrasted with his genius, as a decrepit father who feels no further interest in anything, than to see his active child do deeds of youth. From the worth and truth of his genius he takes all his comfort. For whether beauty, birth, richness of imagination, or profundity of thought do crowned sit in his intellectual parts, he engrafts his love, his own individual enthusiasm and reverence, upon it, and adds to the store. He then forgets his mortal frailties, his poverty, and his lowly position. This shadow,—his inmost being, his inseparable companion,—has such an abundance, that a small portion of its glory,—that part, perhaps, acknowledged by his contemporaries suffices him. His only wish is, that his genius should strive for the highest glory.—Then, ten times happy he.

SONNET XXXVIII.

How can my muse want subject to invent,
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
Thine own sweet argument, too excellent
For every vulgar paper to rehearse?
O! give thyself the thanks, if aught in me
Worthy perusal stand against thy sight;
For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee,
When thou thyself dost give invention light?
Be thou the tenth muse, ten times more in worth
Than those old nine which rhymers invocate;
And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
Eternal numbers to out-live long date.
  If my slight muse do please these curious days,
  The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise.

How can his muse want subject to invent, while his genius breathes, while its own sweet essence is being

poured into his verse. If anything written by him is worth reading, his genius alone deserves the praise. Who, inspired by such a genius, would find it difficult to describe it? Yes, it shall be the tenth muse, ten times more in worth than those old nine which rhymers invocate; and therefore, he would wish to bring forth eternal numbers to outlive long date. When we reflect upon the wonderful originality of the poet, the entirely new paths which he opens up, and in which it would not be prudent to attempt to follow him; when we consider this, how strikingly true does, then, the comparison appear of the genius which dictates *his* works, with the tenth muse, surpassing the old nine which had dictated the works of those who preceded him? How would it, on the other hand, appear if all this referred to an earthly friend?

SONNET XXXIX.

O! HOW thy worth with manners may I sing,
When thou art all the better part of me?
What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?
And what is't but mine own, when I praise thee?
Even for this let us divided live,
And our dear love lose name of single one,
That by this separation I may give
That due to thee which thou deserv'st alone.
O absence! what a torment would'st thou prove,
Were it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave
To entertain the time with thoughts of love,
Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth deceive,
And that thou teachest how to make one twain,
By praising him here, who doth hence remain.

A BETTER key, than what is offered in this sonnet, Shakespeare could hardly give. He is here occupied with the revelation of the essence, the intellectuality of his *ego*, which he could not develope in dramatic characters, as he could his mundane individuality. To enable himself to sing the better part of himself, "with manners," he divides himself into two beings. Those who are unaccustomed to self-examination will find it difficult to follow the poet in such a metaphysical distinction: it will cost much and deep reflection, to distinguish the natural boundary which separates the part speaking, from the part spoken to. The poet gives a symbol proper to both at the conclusion of his "Passionate Pilgrim," in the poem entitled: "*The Phoenix and Turtle*:"—

> Hearts remote, yet not asunder,
> Distance, and no space was seen
> 'Twixt the turtle and his queen:
> But in them it were a wonder.
>
> So between them love did shine,
> That the turtle saw his right
> Flaming in the Phoenix sight:
> Either was the other's mine.
>
> Property was thus appalled,
> That the self was not the same;
> Single nature's double name
> Neither two nor one was called.
>
> Reason, in itself confounded
> Saw division grow together
> To themselves yet either neither,
> Simple were so well compounded.

poet's own words, will hardly comprehend them by any comment. The human attributes of the soul have their basis in the lowest, and the intellectual stretch away into the sublimest regions. The love which he feels towards his genius, is not void of jealousy. The feeling, that he is making a sacrifice, by giving it away from him, by permitting it to enter the world, permeates the whole series of sonnets. We discover it constantly recurring. In speaking here of "pretty wrongs" which his genius unchecked may commit, when far from him, that is, when it may be affected by the customs and temper of the world, and be led into error, and become an instrument for the propagation or encouragement of evil instead of good, and to which its youth and luxuriant beauty render it so liable, those wrongs cannot be regarded otherwise, than such as his genius is capable of committing. Temptation he meets at every step. His genius is gentle, i. e. of quality, and therefore worth corrupting. Every field of human intellectual activity is open before him, and when a woman (Art) woos, what mother's son will sourly leave her till she have prevailed? Alas for him! he considers himself, thereby, deprived of that which belongs to him; his genius, having connexion with *art*, breaks faith twofold: "Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee, thine, by thy beauty being false to me."

SONNET XLII.

THAT thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
Ant yet it may be said, I lov'd her dearly;
That she hath thee, is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly,

Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:—
Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her;
And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,
Suffering my friend for my sake to approve her.
If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss;
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross:
But here 's the joy; *my friend and I are one.*
Sweet flattery!—then, she loves but me alone.

If we penetrate into the subtile distinctions, which Shakespeare makes in the life of his beings, if we, unaccustomed to such profound, such abstract psychological examinations, should be disposed, now and then, to attribute to the poet an expansiveness of mind above the level of human capacity, if we fear at times to lose the clue, is it not encouraging to meet with words like those which conclude the above sonnet? "But here 's the joy; my friend and I are *one.* Sweet flattery! then, she loves but me alone." All love conquests of his genius are also his. If it devotes itself entirely to art, and neglects him in consequence,—perhaps causes him personal loss, if it transfers all love to *art,* it is simply, because he, —his more human, mundane part,—loves art too. However much he may deplore this loss, he still excuses his friend (genius) as above. He delivers over to art entirely his intellectual parts. In many of his dramas, it would have been hard for him to obey so purely, the impulses of his genius, had he allowed his human corporeal being to have a greater share in their composition.

SONNET XLIII.

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
For all the day they view things unrespected;
But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And darkly bright are bright in dark directed.
Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
How would thy shadow's form, form happy show
To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so?
How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made
By looking on thee in the living day,
When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay?
All days are nights to see, till I see thee,
And nights bright days, when dreams do show thee me.

A more powerfully drawn picture of the intensity of his inner life, the poet could scarcely give. It is so clearly a copy of the pure reality, that we shall do best to accept it literally. The more he closes his eyes, which during the whole day have viewed worthless objects,—things unrespected,—the clearer becomes his vision. But when he sleeps, his closed eyes look in dreams upon his genius, and then his mind's eyes darkly bright, see clearer in the darkness. If then the mere shadow of his mind or genius, illuminates the shadows of night, how lovely would that shadow's form appear to the clear day with its (his mind's) much clearer light. How would his eyes be blessed by looking (in pure intellectual abstraction) upon it in the living day, when in dead night (of earthly life) its fair imperfect shade through heavy sleep on his sightless eyes doth stay? The days seem nights to him till he sees it (his genius), and the nights bright days

when his genius shews itself to him in dreams. However imperfect our endeavours to penetrate the spirit of these emanations may be, let them but be compared with the nonsensical and improbable interpretations, which have hitherto been given to the sonnets, and we think that what we have said will prove sufficient for the rejection of the vulgar reading by every reflecting mind.

SONNET XLIV.

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
Injurious distance should not stop my way;
For then, despite of space, I would be brought
From limits far remote where thou dost stay.
No matter then, although my foot did stand
Upon the farthest earth remov'd from thee;
For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,
As soon as think the place where he would be.
But ah! thought kills me, that I am not thought,
To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
But that, so much of earth and water wrought,
I must attend time's leisure with my moan;
  Receiving nought by elements so slow
  But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.

His creative genius would be far away from his earthly self, if the former were to surrender itself exclusively to art. His genius raises itself so far above space and time, that his being, bound by flesh and blood, cannot follow its course. The profound, the complete absorption of the poet in his dramas, in which his highest *ego* lives, we fancy we may here discover. The entire independence of his own self, which so charms us in his pieces, becomes here more comprehensible. During the time

that his genius is occupied with any creation, he (his self) has no concern with it; the regions in which it then ranges, are too abstract for him. Would he were but a thought, to be in an instant with his genius wherever it might be! The reflection that he is not altogether pure thought, annoys him. He is formed of flesh and and blood, earth and water, and belongs to time and space. He must attend time's leisure sorrowfully, till his genius returns from its flights.

SONNET XLV.

The other two, slight air and purging fire,
Are both with thee, wherever I abide;
The first my thought, the other my desire,
These present-absent with swift motion slide:
For when these quicker elements are gone
In tender ambassy of love to thee,
My life, being made of four, with two alone
Sinks down to death, oppress'd with melancholy,
Until life's composition be recured
By those swift messengers return'd from thee,
Who even but now come back again, assured
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me:
This told, I joy; but then, no longer glad,
I send them back again, and straight grown sad.

When we look into the fathomless depths to which the poet descends in his allegory, and feel disposed to draw back;—when the thought occurs to us that this exhausting of a symbol even to its minutiae is excessive, and carried too far, and demands an exertion of the mind offering hardly a satisfactory result, we are brought to the conviction that this human symbol is after all the

only means by which the poet could display the emotions working in the most abstract regions of his intellectual existence. There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy; and where, or in what other man than a Shakespeare have we to search out this? He dedicated intentionally his sonnets to a distant future. If the full and true comprehension of their end and aim be still denied us, let us at least strive to approach their meaning, as near as our humble powers will permit. All nature symbolises itself as a whole in in the mind's eyes of Shakespeare, the most concrete is to him but the extreme of the most subtile. The world consists of earth, water, air, and fire (that these are but the externals he was doubtless in principle as well aware as modern science). Man consists of flesh, blood, mind and soul. The two last hasten with easy mobility to his genius as tender embassy of love; while he with the others, with his inert body, sinks down to death oppressed with melancholy, till the elements of his life be restored by the return of those swift messengers who assure him of the fair health of his genius, which is busied in creations. No sooner does he hear of this, then he sends them back again; he makes this sacrifice to his highest being, and straight grows sad again.

SONNET XLVI.

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
How to divide the conquets of thy sight!
Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.
My heart doth plead, that thou in him dost lie,
(A closet never pierc'd with crystal eyes)

But the defendant doth that plea deny,
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To 'cide this title is impannelled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart;
And by their verdict is determined
The clear eye's moiety, and the dear heart's part;
As thus; mine eye's due is thine outward part,
And my heart's rigbt thine inward love of heart.

Here, as in the whole series of sonnets, the poet terms the eye the perceptive,—the heart the sensitive faculties of his being. Intellect and sentiment. Above and beyond both, and in a certain independence of them, stands his genius. However strange this idea of his whole being may appear to us, Shakespeare adopted it. He maintains it with consistency and emphasis throughout the sonnets from beginning to end; and this it is that has caused them to remain a riddle to superficial readers. Now, when the greatest man of every age and every nation perhaps, whose gigantic intellect is evinced more especially in the knowledge of his own nature, and that of all human kind, would seem to trace the intricate ideas, resolving in his own mind to a general law, as Newton did in the planetary world, should we not accept his conceptions with reverential respect, even though we cannot discover anything like such workings and distinctions in our own minds? Let us reflect that the indefinable impression which the term genius makes upon us in every day language is still something higher, grander, than that left by the words, acuteness, cleverness, abilities, capacity, skill, talent, intellectual endowments &c. By the word genius we comprehend something exceeding the common human measure of intellectuality. Intellect

and sentiment, or to use two more thoroughly English and expressive terms, mind and mood,—perception and conception, eye and heart are now at war in the poet's mind, as to how they have to share his genius between them, or to which of them more especially, it appertains. Each would debar the other the sight of his picture, each claims this right for itself. If truth and beauty in their highest degree are peculiar to Shakespeare's genius, the psychologist may pause in doubt whether the perceptive faculty, or the most subtile sensibility is predominant. Shakespeare himself wavers in his judgement; but his thoughts are all partizens of his heart; and therefore he decides that his eye's due is the outward part of his genius, the construction of his dramas, the care bestowed upon which is perceptible in every word; while his heart's right its inward love of heart, that is, the fresh-warm heartedness which dwells in his genius and its creations belongs to his deepest, tenderest sensibility.

SONNET XLVII.

Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took,
And each doth good turns now unto the other.
When that mine eye is famish'd for a look,
Or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother,
With my love's picture then my eye doth feast,
And to the painted banquet bids my heart:
Another time mine eye is my heart's guest,
And in his thoughts of love doth share a part:
So, either by thy picture or my love,
Thyself away art present still with me;

For thou not farther than my thoughts canst move,
And I am still with them, and they with thee;
Or, if they sleep, thy picture in my sight
Awakes my heart to heart's and eye's delight.

A LEAGUE has been effected between the perceptive and conceptive part of his mortal being. They now do one another good turns. When his perceptive faculty longs for a sight of his genius; or his emotional, i. e. sentimental part smothers itself in longing sighs, then the perceptive power draws his reason and his sentimentality to this imaginative feast; or his eye is his heart's guest, and in its thoughts of love doth share a part. So his genius, even when absent, is still always with him, either in the workings of his perceptive faculty, or in the tender impulses of his heart; for, his genius cannot move farther than his thoughts, and he is still with them and they with it; or when his thoughts and fancies sleep, the picture of his genius (see sonnets XXVII and XLIII) awakes,—stands before his eyes to his heart's and eye's delight. How deeply the poet gazes into his own being here! All that we have experienced (at most a dark consciousness) in the recesses of our own soul, is evident to the mind of the poet in a clearness and comprehensiveness that astounds the philosopher, and which must appear superhuman to him, who is devoid of all self-experience in these regions of abstraction.

SONNET XLVIII.

How careful was I, when I took my way,
Each trifle under truest bars to thrust;
That to my use it might unused stay
From hands of falsehood, in sure wards of trust!

But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
Most worthy comfort, now my greatest grief,
Thou, best of dearest, and mine only care,
Art left the prey of every vulgar thief.
Thee have I not lock'd up in any chest,
Save where thou art not, though I feel thou art,
Within the gentle closure of my breast,
From whence at pleasure thou may'st come and part;
And even thence thou wilt be stol'n, I fear,
For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.

How careful was the poet, when first he began to originate, to thrust each trifle under truest bars, that to his use it might unused stay from hands of falsehood, in sure wards of trust! How different is it now with his genius, compared with which, all his jewels are but trifles! This must refer to his mind alone;—it is impossible to give it any other interpretation. We conceive the meaning of the sonnet to be this:—The poet never unlocked the treasures of his mind;—he cautiously avoided imparting them;—they were kept closely hoarded up in his own breast for his own use. (This agrees with the contents of the first part of the sonnets.) But with regard to his genius, compared with which all the rest dear to his mortal man are mere trifles, he has acted differently. He has not locked up his genius in any chest, save the gentle closure of his breast, where his genius is, and still is not, from whence at pleasure it may come and go. So this, the dearest of his possessions, upon which all his thoughts are concentrated, is the prey of every vulgar thief. His genius is exposed in his dramas to the pilferings of every literary imitator, or copyist; and even in his own bosom he fears it is

not safe, for even his own truth might prove thievish for a prize so dear. He himself, that is, his mortal being, might even wrong his genius, which he essentially considers as being quite independent of himself.

SONNET XLIX.

AGAINST that time, if ever that time come,
When I shall see thee frown on my defects,
Whenas thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
Call'd to that audit by advis'd respects;
Against that time, when thou shalt strangely pass,
And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye;
When love, converted from the thing it was,
Shall reasons find of settled gravity;
Against that time do I ensconce me here,
Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
And this my hand against myself uprear,
To guard the lawful reasons on thy part:
To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
Since why to love I can allege no cause.

AGAINST that time, if it should ever come, when his genius shall frown upon his earthly defects, when it has exhausted its utmost love upon him, when advised considerations shall render an audit necessary; against the time, when his highest ego will hardly know his mortal self, and scarcely greet him with that sun, its eye, when its love for him, grown cold, will find reasons for settled gravity; against that time he ensconces himself here (in his sonnets) with the consciousness of his own deserts, and raises the hand, with which he pens these emanations against his *self* to guard the rightful claims of his genius. To forsake him, his genius has the strength of laws, since he can allege no cause why it should love his mortal part.

SONNET L.

How heavy do I journey on the way,
When what I seek (my weary travel's end)
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,
"Thus far the miles are measur'd from thy friend!"
The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
Plots dully on to bear that weight in me,
As if by some instinct the wretch did know,
His rider lov'd not speed being made from thee.
The bloody spur cannot provoke him on
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,
Which heavily he answers with a groan,
More sharp to me than spurring to his side;
  For that same groan doth put this in my mind,
  My grief lies onward, and my joy behind.

SONNET LI.

Thus can my love excuse the slow offence
Of my dull bearer, when from thee I speed:
From where thou art why should I haste me thence?
Till I return of posting is no need.
O! what excuse will my poor beast then find,
When swift extremity can seem but slow?
Then should I spur, though mounted on the wind;
In winged speed no motion shall I know:
Then can no horse with my desire keep pace;
Therefore desire, (of perfect love being made)
Shall neigh (no dull flesh) in his fiery race;
But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade;
  Since from thee going he went wilful-slow,
  Towards thee I'll run, and give him leave to go.

Although we think to catch the meaning of these two sonnets, yet we feel incapable of giving an interpretation so clear and satisfactory that we would ourselves adopt it as a positive conviction. The reader who

has followed us thus far will be, by this time as certain we are that the poet's words are not to be taken literally;—that he is not speaking of a visit to a friend, of a journey, nor of a real animal. "The beast that bears me" is certainly nothing else than his own flesh and blood, his own corporeal being.

SONNET LII.

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key
Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure,
The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure,
Therefore, are feasts so solemn and so rare,
Since seldom coming, in the long year set
Like stones of worth, they thinly placed are,
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.
So is the time that keeps you as my chest,
Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide,
To make some special instant special-blest,
By new unfolding his imprison'd pride.
  Blessed are you, whose worthiness gives scope,
  Being had, to triumph, being lack'd, to hope.

He compares himself to the rich man who holds the key, which can gratify his heart by the sight of his locked up treasure at any time, but who will not survey it at every hour for fear of blunting the fine point of rare pleasure. Therefore feasts are so solemn because they seldom occur in the course of the monotonous year. They are thinly placed like precious stones in a diadem. So it is too with the time when his genius is absorbed in creations, then it does not exist for him, it is hidden from him like a holiday dress in a wardrobe,

that it may make some special instant special blest. With what emphasis and energy does Shakespeare endeavour through the whole circlet of sonnets, to give expression to the idea, that, however inly connected, he has two separate existences! This idea is the basis of his effusions. Let us accept it then as a plain truth, free from all self-delusion; let us not, because it comes from Shakespeare, refuse to accept it as a psychological verity, one that is, in fact, applicable to human kind in general, but one that can be proved only in the highest degree of the intellectual life of a Shakespeare.

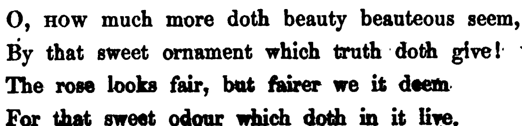
SONNET LIII.

WHAT is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new:
Speak of the spring, and foison of the year,
The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
The other as your bounty doth appear;
And you in every blessed shape we know.
In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

NOTHING can be clearer than this sonnet, when we have convinced ourselves, that the psychological element is the moving principle of Shakespeare's dramas, that the poet's own ego speaks in all his characters, that, superior to all petty considerations, he allows his genius

free play in the elaboration of the fictions upon which his dramas are founded. Of what mortal man could he say that which, if referred to his genius, becomes the most self-evident reality? "What is your substance, whereof are you made," he exclaims, "that millions of strange shadows on you tend?" What can more truly delineate Shakespeare's universality in art, than the remainder of this sonnet? If his genius describes the spring or foison of the year (we apply this literally to the wonderful scenery in his dramas) the one shows figuratively the shadow of its (his genius') beauty, the other as its bounty or superabundance. In all external grace his genius has some part, but it resembles none, none it, for constant heart,—i. e. for being every where alike in its perception and delineation of nature and character. And is it not so? Have not posterity, and more especially foreign nations proved it to be so? Do not mankind the remoter they are from the great poet, the more clearly penetrate his meaning? How do the commentaries of a Johnson, a Blair, nay even of Dryden read now? Did the etymologist, the stylist, the really fine poet comprehend the great author they were so self-conceited as to criticise? What they thought to be faults have been proved beauties;—what they thought frivolity we perceive to be pleasing allegory.

SONNET LIV.



O, HOW much more doth beauty beauteous seem,
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

> The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye,
> As the perfumed tincture of the roses;
> Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly
> When summer's breath their masked buds discloses;
> But, for their virtue only is their show,
> They live unwoo'd, and unrespected fade;
> Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
> Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made:
> And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
> When that shall fade, my verse distils your truth.

This could not apply to the productions of any poet, destined to live for all people and all ages, with the same truthfulness, as it does to the roses, or let us say prosaically, to the dramas of Shakespeare, for nothing else, absolutely nothing else, is here meant. Other dramatic productions, compared with his, are as wild canker blooms to the sweet smelling rose. They have indeed colours equally fair, hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly when summer's breath their masked buds discloses; but their whole worth consists solely in their show; they fade unrespected and die in themselves, while from the sweet death of sweet-smelling roses the sweetest odours are distilled. In the same way the odour of his intellectual rose, his genius, shall be preserved in his verses. The poet could not say in plainer language what his circlet of sonnets should contain.

bull!

The foregoing sonnet has most particular interest for us; it is, in our opinion, the completest justification of the reasons advanced in our commentary upon Hamlet. The external beauty of his dramas, perfect as it is, he values not above that displayed in the works of other master-minds; but the odour of eternal truths, his genius,

it is, which lives alone in the former, and which distinguishes them from others, as sweet smelling roses differ from the wild inodorous flowers.

SONNET LV.

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall out-live this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth: your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity,
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

What false stress would exist in this prophecy, if the poet were not addressing his own genius, if he were instead speaking of the corporeal beauty of a friend? Who but Shakespeare can it possibly be? Who but his immortal part, that still lives in his sonnets and in his creations? What is the endurance of stone or marble compared with such an intellectual everlasting existence? His powerful rhyme shall *out-live* marble and the gilded monuments of princes! And so it has, and so it will. The event justifies the prophetic appreciation of his powers. His genius too shall shine more bright in these contents. This living record of the memory of his genius shall defy the sword of Mars, and

all consuming fire of war. His genius shall pace forth against death and all oblivious enmity: the praise of his genius shall still find room even in the eyes of all lovers of the fair and true, until the day of judgment, when it will rise again to live on in spiritual eternity. These are words which, we leave to the reader to decide, either sprung from sincere deep-seated, prophetically justifiable enthusiasm, we might say intellectual second-sight, or from the self conceited fixed idea of a fool. There is no middle path. Here Shakespeare speaks like a crazy rhymster, or a far-seeing, truly self-appreciating great spirit, who felt that himself alone was capable of sitting in judgment upon his genius. We firmly believe the latter.

SONNET LVI.

Sweet love; renew thy force; be it not said,
Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
Which but to-day by feeding is allay'd,
To-morrow sharpen'd in his former might:
So, love, be thou; although to-day thou fill
Thy hungry eyes, even till they wink with fulness,
To-morrow see again, and do not kill
The spirit of love with a perpetual dulness.
Let this sad interim like the ocean be
Which parts the shore, where two contracted new
Come daily to the banks, that when they see
Return of love more blest may be the view;
Or call it winter, which being full of care,
Makes summer's welcome thrice more wish'd, more rare.

We are presented with the state of Shakespeare's mind after the completion of a production. He, that is his genius, has entirely exhausted itself in the effort.

The hungry eyes of his mind have been so satiated with the abundance of images, that they sink in sheer weariness. But they must be like the bodily appetites which, to-day allayed by feeding recover all their keenness to-morrow. He must not surrender himself to any mind-deadening idleness. After the completion of such works as Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth &c.—works denoting such wonderful powers of mind, that any one of them would have exhausted the whole intellectual store of any other human mind, it is not surprising that his genius, like the earthly body, should require rest after labour. His mind, before it can with equal power pour itself out in another direction, claims a pause—"a sad interim,"—but it resembles the winter which being full of care makes summer's welcome thrice more wished, more rare. With renewed force, when this sad interim is over, he again devotes himself to fresh creations.

SONNET LVII.

Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
Nor services to do, till you require.
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour,
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour,
When you have bid your servant once adieu:
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought,
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose;
But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought,
Save where you are, how happy you make those.
So true a fool is love, that in your will
(Though you do any thing) he thinks no ill.

His outward man is but the slave of his immortal part, and only exists for the sake of the latter. It is not for his human individuality to question with jealous thought where his genius may be, or what it is doing. It is not for him to complain of the absence of his sovereign, he has but slave-like to stay and think of nought save where his genius is. So true a fool is love, i. e. the enthusiasm for his genius, that, however the latter may deal with him, he sees no evil in it. Do what it may, it ennobles even the lowest thoughts.

SONNET LVIII.

That God forbid, that made me first your slave,
I should in thought control your times of pleasure,
Or at your hand th' account of hours do crave,
Being your vassal, bound to stay your leisure!
O! let me suffer (being at your beck)
Th' imprison'd absence of your liberty;
And patience, tame to sufferance, bide each check,
Without accusing you of injury.
Be where you list; your charter is so strong,
That you yourself may privilege your time:
Do what you will, to you it doth belong
Yourself to pardon of self-doing crime.
  I am to wait, though waiting so be hell,
  Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well.

The God, who created the man Shakespeare to be above all others the slave of his genius, that God forbid that he, the mortal, should control in thought its times of relaxation. It is not for him, the vassal, to demand account from his sovereign. In other words; he is obliged to let his genius take its own time to have free

scope in all its creations, and not disturb or thwart it by any mere human temporal and temporary considerations,—such considerations would in our opinion have influenced the poet, had he, for aesthetical reasons, suppressed many horrid scenes in his dramas. His person has nothing to do with his genius, but to wait in patience and in tame sufferance to bide each check. His genius is responsible for all. In whatever sphere it loses itself, let it do what it will, his human part has no voice or act in it. In this sonnet, we think, lies the refutation of all that the most enlightened criticism has found fault with in Shakespeare's dramas. Everything that could be said against them with reason, stood clearly before Shakespeare's far-seeing mind's eye; but he allowed his genius free scope in creating according to its sublime impulses, bowing himself down before his spirit. For our part, to press back to the respectful distance which becomes us, when in the presence of Shakespeare we must imagine the view which his genius took of men and things, when compared with our own limited mortal capacity, to be similar to the view taken by a Humboldt of the whole field of the universe, compared with the confined gaze of a simple peasant or mechanic in the fields of his native village.

SONNET LIX.

If there be nothing new, but that which is
Hath been before, how are our brains beguil'd,
Which, labouring for invention, bear amiss
The second burden of a former child?
O! that record could with a backward look,

Even of five hundred courses of the sun,
Show me your image in some antique book,
Since mind at first in character was done:
That I might see what the old world could say
To this composed wonder of your frame:
Whether we are mended, or where better they,
Or whether revolution be the same.
O! sure I am, the wits of former days
To subjects worse have given admiring praise.

We claim the reader's most particular attention for this sonnet. Let him read and answer, whether the poet could possibly have man, woman or mortal friend in view. If he be not here communing with his own mind, what can the sonnet mean? Let the unbiassed reader bear constantly in mind that these sonnets have been ever hitherto regarded as being dedicated, addressed, and absolutely applied to a friend and to a mistress. To one, to the other, or otherwise meaningless: this has been the opinion received by the literary world. We claim the decision of the reader between our interpretation, and that hitherto held. In this sonnet Shakespeare with a child-like simplicity on the one hand, and a clearness of intellect to which we cannot soar, on the other, puts to himself a great question. If there be indeed nothing new under the sun, if every thing that is, has been before, if man remain man, if the most commanding intellects be mere apparitions which repeat themselves, if such a genius, as his, should have already dwelt in some form on the earth, what self-delusion on his part to labour his brains for invention to show his ego in all its beauty, when after all, it had been in the world before, and possibly would be again. It

would be but bearing amiss the second burden of a former child. O! could he but look back into the record of five hundred years past, if he could find the likeness of his genius in some antique book, since first the mind could show itself by written characters, that he might see whether the ancient world had any thing similar to show, whether a man equally gifted, had ever been before on earth, whether the high intellects of mankind had improved or retrograded, or whether, upon the whole, the human mind were the same, neither better nor worse. We can only take all this literally; it becomes then a profound reflection appertaining to the highest abstraction. Shakespeare himself gives an answer to this question. O! sure am I, the wits of former days to subjects worse have given admiring praise. He had sought, but not found, one genius equal to his! Can we conceive the idea that a progress may be inherent in genius, perceptible from millenium to millenium? His genius is the *herald* to the gaudy spring of a new era.

SONNET LX.

Like the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow;

Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

The thought symbolized in this sonnet has its source in the highest intellectual regions of the poet's mind. No mortal man was ever before, or has since been favoured with such a power of penetration into universal nature, no man ever was or has since been gifted with such a vast objective scope. He stands as it were on the highest pinnacle of self-consciousness;—far above all fear of misconstruction, far above mere cant and hyperbole, and free from the shackles of custom, education, and stale plagiarism. Such heavenly touches never touch'd earthly faces. We made the remark in our commentary upon Hamlet, that the comparisons and figures of the poet were to be taken, not as ornaments of speech, but rather as symbols, which permitted the idea to be more fully brought home to our minds than could be effected by abstruse words. In these sonnets we have nothing but the purest symbolizing of his immortal part. We may here gain, to a certain extent, some insight into Shakespeare's convictions as to humanity, immortality, and the Supreme Being, although we may not be able to follow him in the highest realms of his reflections. In this simple but most beautifully expressed description of man's existence, he concludes with the prophetic declaration, that his verse shall stand to future generations and praise the worth of his genius despite Time's cruel hand. If the poet meant by "thy worth," the worth of a friend or mistress, we might, with the best reason, ask:—What

worth?—for we have no proof of it. The mere fact of Shakespeare's loving the assumed friend or mistress, does not make the one nor the other valuable to posterity. In the whole course of the sonnets we find no personal qualities described deserving of the admiration or love of future generations;—nay, even to the last, we are left in ignorance of the *name* of the supposed personage. If, therefore, the initials W. H. refer to any *other person* than *William himself*, that *other person* has certainly but little of the immortality promised in these verses. Shakespeare alone has the immortality; and as far as any one but himself is concerned, it is self-evident the prophecy, or the hope of immortality, is unaccomplished and becomes the crassest bombast.

SONNET LXI.

Is it thy will, thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,
While shadows, like to thee, do mock my sight?
Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
So far from home, into my deeds to pry;
To find out shames, and idle hours in me,
The scope and tenour of thy jealousy?
O no! thy love, though much, is not so great:
It is my love that keeps mine eye awake:
Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,
To play the watchman ever for thy sake:
For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all to near.

The most difficult task for us, and for most readers, will be the thorough penetration and comprehension of

those sonnets which, like this one, take their origin in a thought which arises in Shakespeare's mind from a most intimate consciousness of the separation of the two parts or principles of existence,—from the duplicature so to speak, of his intellectual *ego*. Let us take this duplicature for granted, either generally, or in Shakespeare alone; for he it was who in his dramatic creations presented us with experiences in intellectual life hitherto unknown, begging us to give them welcome as strangers, there being more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy. His genius leaves him no peace. We can sympathize with the poet, when his earthly man is wearied and worn by the untiring workings of his mind. But it is not the will of his genius that its image should keep open his heavy eyelids to the weary night. O no! the love of his genius is not so great; it is his own self-love, his enthusiastic imagination, that keeps his eye awake and defeats his body's rest, to play the watchman ever for the sake of his genius. From this we may conclude, that it was Shakespeare's custom to think out his productions, while on his couch, during the dark and silent hours of the night, committing his ideas to paper at his leisure during the ensuing day. This we think is what he means by the words "playing the watchman for thy sake."

SONNET LXII.

SIN of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
And all my soul, and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart.

Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account;
And for myself mine own worth do define,
As I all other in all worths surmount.
But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
Beaten and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;
Self so self-loving were iniquity,
'T is thee (myself) that for myself I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

We request the reader's attention more especially to this sonnet for two reasons; first, as it may serve to explain the sonnets CXXXV to CLIV; and secondly, because we think the poet could hardly speak plainer in confirmation of our interpretation. The sin of self-love possesses all his soul, and every part of his humanity, and there is no remedy for it. This sin is grounded inwardly in his heart. He thinks, and candidly vents his thoughts, that no intellectual face is so gracious as his, no shape so true, no truth of such account. He impartially defines his own worth, and concludes that he surpasses all others in powers of mind. But when he looks into the mirror of his self-examination, and perceives himself beaten and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity, he views his self-love in another light; *so* to love one's self would be a crime. "No! 't is thee, myself, that for myself I praise, painting my age with beauty of thy (young) days." We would ask, can words convey plainer meaning than this, in the sense we read the sonnets?

SONNET LXIII.

Against my love shall be, as I am now,
With time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn;
When hours have drain'd his blood, and fill'd his brow
With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn
Hath travell'd on to age's steepy night;
And all those beauties, whereof now he's king,
Are vanishing, or vanish'd out of sight,
Stealing away the treasure of his spring;
For such a time do I now fortify
Against confounding age's cruel knife,
That he shall never cut from memory
My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life;
His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
And they shall live, and he in them still green.

The poet here looks into the future with a freedom and self-appreciating candour that could proceed only from a Shakespeare. We perceive in it a religious simplicity and a consciousness of the fact that though his genius was derived from the Supreme Author of all, and source and centre of all intellectuality, yet, being conjoined with the body and the world, it was of the earth, earthy, and, therefore subject to the same laws. It was given him to please and instruct mankind, and he had to employ the gift ere it sank into sereness and decay; for time would produce the same effects upon his genius as upon his body. He makes a distinction between his soul and his genius, or worldly intellectuality, as may be seen in sonnet LXII.—"The sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye, and all my *soul* and all my every part."—All the beauty of which his genius in its prime can boast, all the ardent glow of his youthful

spirit will dry up, and some day cease to be; against such a time he now fortifies! He will preserve to mankind an intellectual beauty, which perhaps only appears once in the course of centuries. *This* beauty of his genius *shall in these black lines been seen,* and they shall live eternally, and show his genius ever young. Could the poet speak plainer as to the object of his sonnet? The reflection, that these effusions, the self-analysis, and deep secrets of his soul, thinly, but most ingeniously covered by the veil of an allegory, have at length, after a lapse of two hundred years, been comprehended by us, fills us—why should we not confess it—with heartfelt delight the more exquisite and natural, because we fully see and understand the vast intellectual difference between ourself and the greatest man that perhaps the world ever knew.

SONNET LXIV.

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich proud cost of out-worn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-rased,
And brass eternal, slave to mortal rage:
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,
Increasing store with loss, and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay,
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate—
That time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

SHAKESPEARE becomes more and more absorbed in self-meditation. He surveys in a clear and philosophical spirit the laws which govern the universe in their generality and applicability to every individuality,—in their action upon mind and matter. The former bears the same relationship to the latter, as the odour to the flower (a symbol which he has sufficiently exhausted). All and everything fades and becomes altered by time; and man's individuality is no exception. When the poet perceives lofty towers levelled to the ground, and eternal brass succumb to the fury of the elements, when he sees the ocean gaining upon the land, and the land in turn pressing back the sea, each enriching itself by the others' loss, when he considers how states change their borders, or become confounded in common decay, the thought occurs to him that his genius too, his intellectual ego, is subject to this fate, and must in time vanish into oblivion. This thought is as a death, which cannot choose but weep to have that which it fears to lose.

SONNET LXV.

SINCE brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
Bud sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O! how shall summer's honey-breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall time's best jewel from time's chest lie hid?

Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O none! unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

NOTHING is lasting! Gloomy mortality holds its sway over brass and stone, over the earth and boundless sea. And how should the intellectual beauty of his genius, whose action is no stronger than the odour of a flower, hold out against this all devastating power? Does summer's honey breath with-stand the storms of winter? How should the bloom of his mind resist the rough action of time, when even impregnable rocks and gates of steel crumble away under its influence! O fearful meditation! Where shall he preserve the most precious gem, that time has produced, from Time's destroying fury? Where is the strong hand, that can hold his swift foot back? Who can forbid his spoil of beauty? O none! unless this miracle have might that in black ink *my genius* may still shine bright.

SONNET LXVI.

TIR'D with all these, for restful death I cry;—
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,

And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill;
Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that to die I leave my love alone.

The state of mind, to which the poet here gives utterance, must be well known, at least in a degree, to every man of thought and feeling. What a striking resemblance,—how near akin intellectually,—to Hamlet! Here, with this convincing example, we think it fit, we boldly venture to speak our mind as to the relationship which Shakespeare's creations bore to his own inmost being. Each of his dramas is the embodiment, the symbolization of a part of his own ego. Between two dramas the opposites of each other, he holds the mean. He himself speaks through his characters. His lowest creatures, too, representing as they do with the most pungent truthfulness, the uncultivated extreme of the same human intellect in all its coarseness, receive by this integrality of the work, that artistic and intellectual savour, which superficial criticism has not been able to discover; they are the true offspring of Shakespeare. Where, as in Hamlet, the main idea of the piece soars into the highest intellectual regions, where the hero becomes exquisitely metaphysical, we have the innerself of Shakespeare. The words of Hamlet in his celebrated monologue, which is the point of the whole drama:—"Who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressors wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?"—do they

not give expressiont in a special situation, to the very same sentiment, that the poet here entertains, in a world wide and actual application?—We are fully aware and readily allow, that an excessive indulgence in such ideas may carry us beyond the limits of healthy reflection, yet they are purely human, and if we cast off our worldly bias, and see in Shakespeare the more subtile and the more intensive perception of our finest feelings, we shall then sympathize with him in his thorough contempt, his deeply rooted disgust for the pitiful outward show and gloss of humanity. This rankness of sham and cant in all social relations, to which Shakespeare in Hamlet held up such a faithful mirror, and which so deeply shocked his inmost being, that he yearns for restful death, was it confined to his age alone? Would he not in our time find it just the same, if not worse? Let us suppose the poet exclaiming to our time:—"I cry for restful death, weary with beholding merit and talent struggling hopelessly with poverty, and the empty-minded living in luxury, the purest faith unhappily forsworn, virtue slandered, right perverted, strength disabled by limping sway, intellect restricted by authority, folly controlling skill, simple truth miscalled simplicity, and good subject to evil."—Tired with all these, he would be gone, did not the desire, that his genius might live, make him cling to life.

SONNET LXVII.

AH! wherefore with infection should he live,
And with his presence grace impiety,
That sin by him advantage should achieve,
And lace itself with his society?

Why should false painting imitate his cheek,
And steal dead seeing of his living hue?
Why should poor beauty indirectly seek
Roses of shadow, since his rose is true?
Why should he live, now nature bankrupt is,
Beggar'd of blood to blush through lively veins?
For she hath no exchequer now but his,
And, proud of many, lives upon his gains.
O! him she stores, to show what wealth she had
In days long since, before these last so bad.

SHAKESPEARE in the last sonnet speaks in his own person and for himself. In this sonnet, and in the following, he speaks of his genius. He again employs the word "store," in reference to the latter (or art), which is to be stored, against seasons of intellectual dearth by nature herself. The poet here, as frequently elsewhere, seizes upon an expression, which being immediately connected with the line of thought, breaks rather strangely in upon the symbol. Why, says the poet, should his genius live with the literary infection of his age, and with its presence grace impiety, that sin by it advantage should achieve, and glory in being connected therewith. In other words, why should he condescend to mix up the true outpourings of his mind with baser matter to make his dramas popular? Why should false painting imitate merely the out-lines, the healthy natural colouring of his art? (This in the widest sense still applies to our own time). Why should the Beautiful, by indirect ways, (i. e. by accomodating itself to the ruling fashion), seek roses of shadow, when his own rose is the true and natural one? Why should his genius live in an age when Nature is bankrupt, *beggared of blood*

to blush through lively veins? Nature found no true friend through whom she could reveal herself, but his genius, and this she preserved, to show what wealth she had in days long since.

SONNET LXVIII.

Thus is his cheek the map of days out-worn,
When beauty liv'd and died as flowers do now,
Before these bastard signs of fair were borne,
Or durst inhabit on a living brow;
Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
To live a second life on second head;
Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay.
In him those holy antique hours are seen,
Without all ornament, itself, and true,
Making no summer of another's green,
Robbing no old to dress his beauty new;
  And him as for a map doth nature store,
  To show false art what beauty was of yore.

Thus is the cheek, the expression, the utterance of his genius, his originality in the drama, the map of days out-worn, when beauty lived and died as flowers do now (referring doutless to the classic period of Grecian art) before these bastard poets, these imitators of the beautiful were endured or durst show and plume themselves upon their imitations (as was the case in his time and is also in our own); before the golden tresses of the dead, the right of sepulchres were shorn away, to live a second life on second head; ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay. This is directed most assuredly against that false drama and art generally which does

not, like his, exhibit the true and inner-life, but adorns itself with false and dead traditions, covering a bald modern head with a Grecian wig. A more trenchant and truly correct distinction between his art and that of other modern writers, prior and posterior to himself, the poet could not give. He, that is his genius, makes no summer of another's green;—he steals not the forms of Greece and Rome; —he plunders no dead anothers to dress and decorate his thoughts; no dead tresses hang around his brow. In primeval loveliness, independent of all adornment, the spirit, sterling and true, of antique idealism lives again in him.—And his art, the beauty of his eye, nature doth preserve (store) as a map, a chart, a guide, to show *false* art *what beauty was of yore.*— We might pursue our remarks, and, with this sonnet before us, indulge in some curious reflections upon the pitiful plagiarists (a Voltaire for one) who in their blind self-conceit and shallowness, have dared to criticise and contemn a Shakespeare.

SONNET LXIX.

Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view,
Want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend:
All tongues (the voice of souls) give thee that due,
Uttering bare truth, even so as foes commend.
Thine outward thus with outward praise is crown'd;
But those same tongues that give thee so thine own,
In other accents do this praise confound,
By seeing farther than the eye hath shown.
They look into the beauty of thy mind,
And that, in guess, they measure by thy deeds;

Then (churls) their thoughts, although their eyes were kind,
To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds:
But why thy odour matcheth not thy show,
The solve is this; — that thou dost common grow.

How plainly the poet here speaks of his own art, of his own works. This, and the foregoing sonnet might serve indeed, as an answer to the many expositions and would-be elucidations of his dramas. With a most wonderful power of divination, Shakespeare foresaw what the most enlightened, or, suppose we were to say, theoretical criticism of later generations might condemn in his works. No author ever evinced so clear a preception of his own art. With end and aim, maturely considered and well defined, he wrote even that which our modern aesthetic demands to have expunged. Those parts of his art, he says, which the world's eye doth view, that is, which are open to criticism, want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend: all tongues, or nations, (the voice of souls) admit this, and utter bare truth like foes that praise. Thus is the outward form of his art, crowned with outward praise; but those same tongues that give him so his due, confound this praise with other accents, by seeing farther than the eye hath shown, by spying into the moral, aesthetic tendencies of his genius, by guessing where they cannot comprehend. Then their churl-like empty minds, though kindly disposed towards the poet, add the rank smell of weeds to the fair flower. These words of Shakespeare might have deterred us from our present analysis, might have induced us to keep our interpretation looked up in our own breast; for, though our eyes were kind, our thoughts might add

the rank smell of weeds to his fair flower. But the weedy smell, we remembered, had already been added by the general misconception, and it became the duty of kind eyes to make an effort to restore the pristine purity and fragrance.—The poet concludes:—but why the odour or inner-worth of his art, matches not with the outward show or forms, the solve is this;—"that it doth common grow." The meaning of this is, we think;—Shakespeare's genius, in its peculiar naturalness and universality, exhibits itself in the lowest as well as in the highest characters, with the truthfulness and apparent simplicity of nature whose "odour" matches not her show; for the wonders of nature being in their "show" common, their externals,—constantly exposed to the eye,—are regarded as things of course. And when attention and study are excited in the minds of a few, how mistaken often are the results! The eyes that explore the beauties and wonders of nature are kind, but how false often their judgments! And have we not also some reason to fear, that the more common the study of nature and Shakespeare grows, the more hasty and undigested will the opinions be?

SONNET LXX.

THAT thou art blam'd shall not be thy defect,
For slander's mark was ever yet the fair;
The ornament of beauty is suspect,
A crow that flies in heaven's sweetest air.
So thou be good, slander doth but approve
Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time;
For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,
And thou present'st a pure unstained prime.

Thou hast past by the ambush of young days,
Either not assail'd, or victor being charged;
Yet this thy praise cannot be so thy praise,
To tie up envy, evermore enlarged:
If some suspect of ill mask'd not thy show,
Then, thou alone kingdoms of hearts shouldst owe.

The unfavourable criticism directed against his works will not prove any defect in his genius, the condemnation will not proceed from a purer aesthetic than *his*. "The ornament of beauty,"—the most original mind is ever suspected to be a crow that flies in heaven's sweetest air. But if his genius be good, slander will only prove its worth the greater, being woo'd of *Time;* that is, admired and preferred by posterity, for canker vice loves the sweetest buds, and his genius presents a pure unstained originality. His genius, as displayed in his early works, has escaped the ambush, the criticism of young days, that is, of his *own time,* either not assailed, or, when it was, by coming off the victor; yet this praise cannot be once and for all its praise, or guarantee against envy evermore enlarged, i. e. which will follow his works from generation to generation; and, indeed, if some *suspect* of *ill*, masked not its show or tendency, then his genius alone would undividedly govern all hearts.

SONNET LXXI.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead,
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:

Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O! if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay;
  Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
  And mock you with me after I am gone.

SHAKESPEARE's thoughts take, with this sonnet, a new direction. Many might be inclined to suppose that the strict distinction between the death of the one and the surviving of the other could apply only to two corporeal beings; and it might appear to offer a prop to that fanciful conception propagated throughout the world as to the object of these sonnets. Let us see what degree of scrutiny this popular interpretation will bear. So, then, the most serious reflection that can possibly occupy the heart of man,—the thought of death,—the dissolution of his being,—his burial,—the destruction of his body by worms,—excited no other fear or care in Shakespeare than that his friend, the *earl*, might take it too much to heart! The poet's scope and hope protended no further than this!—Only the few years that his younger friend might possibly survive him were present to his view! We are to believe that this man, this discerning contemplative man, this poet-philosopher, this scanner of self, and mankind, sank into such unnatural, lackadaisycal self-renunciation as to exclaim, at the conclusion of the above sonnet, that his friend must not so much as his poor name rehearse, but let his love decay; lest the world

should mock them both after the poet's death! — This self-depreciation has no object, unless directed from his genius to his individual man. This latter appears to him so insignificant, so worthless, compared with the former, i. e. his mortal part compared with his immortal part,— the spirit which is to live in his works, compared with his humanity destined to become a prey to to the worms, that the first must mourn no longer than it shall hear the death knell give warning that he has fled from this vile world with vilest worms to dwell. But when the poet exclaims to his genius in plain words: "If you read this line, remember not the hand that writ it;"— we can, indeed, only proximately imagine the abstract view which dictated such an injunction. We think, however, to perceive how Shakespeare regarded the post-existence of his innerself, the immortality of his intellectual essence, in its amalgamation with the minds of after generations. The concluding lines of this sonnet might perhaps justify the supposition that Shakespeare was addressing him who, in after times, should happen to comprehend the object of these sonnets. Him he exhorts not to rehearse his discovery and exhibit the relation which the poet bears to these verses, lest the wise world should mock him.—We venture the essay.

SONNET LXXII.

O! LEST the world should task you to recite
What merit liv'd in me, that you should love
After my death, dear love, forget me quite,
For you in me can nothing worthy prove;
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,

To do more for me than mine own desert,
And hang more praise upon deceased I,
Then niggard truth would willingly impart.
O! lest your true love may seem false in this,
That you for love speak well of me untrue,
My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.
  For I am sham'd by that which I bring forth,
  And so should you, to love things nothing worth.

IF the poet spoke thus to a friend, to an Earl of Southampton, he would be guilty of an unmitigated falsehood, or of a self-debasement bordering on idiotcy. It would be a sickly, false, unnatural humility, opposed to that first principle upon which every living organism, and indeed every intellectual organism, is based. We reiterate, that only from the highest pinnacle of that which we have termed his *genius,* could he have thus looked down upon the London play-actor whose name he desires may be buried with his body and forgotten, and not live to shame both his person Shakespeare and his genius; for the former is shamed by the powers and productions of the latter, and this would be shamed for having preferred so humble and unregarded an individual for its manifestation. It sounds as if the poet were seeking an explanation within himself why nature should have endowed him with such an imagination, and yet denied him the position and means to cultivate it and employ it in a sphere where it would have had a wider, perhaps a nobler range, and greater effect.

SONNET LXXIII.

That time of year thou may'st in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sun-set fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest:
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long:

His genius now beholds him arrived at that time of life when yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang upon those boughs which shake against the cold. His intellect is waxing dim in the twilight of age. Death's second self that seals up all in rest. In him his mind, his inmost being, seeth the glowing of such fire that on the ashes of his youth doth lie, as the death bed whereon it must expire, consumed with that which it was nourished by.

How comprehensive, how vast is this allegory! The latent idea is so interwoven with the symbol, that the one can hardly be sundered from the other, and we can do no more than direct the reader's attention to it.—The idea of the immortality (mundanely) of his intellectual being is clearly evinced we think, in this and the following sonnets. The separation between that part of him which falls to the worms, and that part

which is to live after his body shall have returned to dust becomes more and more conspicuous as we pursue his wonderfully subtile intellectual analysis. How far we can follow the poet here, will depend upon the degree of clearness to which we have attained in this highest point of all self-examination. Are we able to conceive the distinctions the poet makes between Shakespeare the man, Shakespeare the mind, and Shakespeare the soul?—The mortal mundane man, the undying mundane mind, or genius, and the everlasting celestial soul?

SONNET LXXIV.

But be contented: when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay:
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee.
The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me:
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead;
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be remembered.
  The worth of that is that which it contains,
  And that is this, and this with thee remains.

We earnestly request those who seek truth, to devote especial attention to this sonnet. Shakespeare's idea is so keen, so thoroughly impregnates every word that it is not in the slightest degree enfeebled by rhyme, verse, or other poetical considerations. In this respect too,

the poet stands wonderfully pre-eminent, and the closer we study him, the greater becomes our admiration. It is only by pondering over his poetical emanations, as over a mathematical problem, that we are able to perceive, that, what we at first took for a mere word of rhyme and measure, or of obsolete sense, is pregnant with meaning, deep and absolutely essential. In penning the words: "*When thou reviewest this,*" he could refer by the word "*thou*" only to his inner self, which, at the moment of writing, was one with him,—viewed the words as they were being penned, and might *re*view them after the death of the outward self. "My spirit is thine, the better part of me," adds the poet, as if he would be quite perspicuous to the "kind eyes," that should hereafter endeavour to penetrate his verse. His genius loses but the dregs of life, the prey of worms, his body being dead, too base a thing to be remembered by his immortal inner-self. Is this the sense?—Shall we continue to assume, that Shakespeare, that great man, whom we are inclined to regard as of almost superhuman intellect, addressed these words, these self-depreciating fawning words, to a man of superior rank in life? Can we, dare we assert, that such miserable contemptible thoughts ever entered his mind? Could he, who put the following words in the mouth of Hamlet, so belie his muse?—

> "No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp
> And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee,
> Where thrift may follow fawning.—
> . . . .
> . . . .
> . . . . and bless'd are those

> Whose blood and judgment are so co-mingled
> That they are not a pipe, for *Fortune's* finger
> To sound what stop she please: *Give me that man*
> That is not *Passion's slave*, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay, in my *heart of heart.*—"
> *Hamlet.* Act III, Scene II.

The worth of that, (i. e. his body) is that which it contains, and that is *this* offspring of his genius, and this remains. This language is so clear and simple to all but the merest superficial readers, that we cannot make it plainer, by attempting to shew the meaning in other words.

SONNET LXXV.

> So are you to my thoughts, as food to life,
> Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;
> And for the peace of you I hold such strife
> As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found:
> Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon
> Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure;
> Now counting best to be with you alone,
> Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure:
> Sometime all full with feasting on your sight,
> And by and by clean starved for a look;
> Possessing or pursuing no delight,
> Save what is had or must from you be took,
> Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day;
> Or gluttoning on all, or all away.

As food is to animal life, or sweet seasoned showers to the ground, so is his genius to his thoughts; and the mortal Shakespeare is as much troubled on account of his genius, as a miser is about his wealth. Now proud

of the possession, anon doubting the filching age will steal his treasure. Now counting best to enjoy it quite alone, then thinking it better that the world may see his pleasure. Sometimes satiated with the contemplation of the wealth of his inner-self, at other times longing in vain for a sight of it. He neither possesses, nor pursues any other delight, save what is had or must be derived from his genius. Thus does he pine and surfeit by turns, either satiating himself on all, or all away.

We have little to add here by way of explanation. The poet allows us such a clear view of his inner-self, paints such a thoroughly natural mood in such vividly faithful colours that it will most assuredly suffice, for further comprehension, to reject the idea that he could have addressed this sonnet to another human being. He who is a stranger to the emotions herein displayed may, indeed, *compare* them to the contradictions which are excited in the breast of a lover; for it is through the sensual symbol that Shakespeare here speaks to us.

SONNET LXXVI.

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why, with the time, do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?
O! know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;

So, all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love, still telling what is told.

WHY, Shakespeare asks himself,—and in writing for posterity, he frankly fixes his eye, as it were upon us who are now occupying ourselves with him,—why is my verse so barren of new pride, of that ornament, of that variation which you are accustomed to in my dramas? Why, as I proceed with these sonnets, do I not glance aside to new-found methods, and compounds strange? Why write I still all one, ever the same, and keep strictly to the symbol I have chosen?—So much so, that every word doth almost tell my name, showing their birth, and where they did proceed? The poet might put the same question at the present day to those who perceive in these sonnets nothing more than amorous whinings addressed to a mistress, or a friend. Were the object an aesthetic one, were the poesy of the sonnets the chief object, he would doubtless have composed them in a different manner; but all he seeks is the simplest, most transparent garment for his most refined emotions; it is nothing else but his love, the enthusiasm for his genius, that flows from his pen. This is his sole argument; so all his best is dressing old words new, spending again what is already spent.—How clearly the poet lets us see, that he is fully aware of what he is about, and of what others may think. He might give a similar answer to many of the commentators upon his dramas. The apparently well-founded objections made by our aesthetic to much that appears in his works, he would

probably have altogether refuted, by declaring that his pen was guided wholly and solely by Truth and Nature; that he had perfectly well foreseen those objections, but that he nevertheless could not, and *would* not write otherwise. As the sun daily repeats himself, so his enthusiasm still iterates, but unenfeebled, what has already been said.

SONNET LXXVII.

THY glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste;
The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
And of this book this learning may'st thou taste:
The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show,
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory;
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth may'st know
Time's thievish progress to eternity.
Look, what thy memory cannot contain,
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
Those children nurs'd *deliver'd from thy brain*,
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
Shall profit thee, and much enrich thy book.

THIS sonnet, which at a first reading seems dark, becomes on closer study clearer, if taken literally in our sense. It is a recapituation of all that has been given in the preceding sonnets. Three there are that admonish his genius to be quick. His *glass*,—his self-knowledge,—which shews him how his beauties wear away,—his *dial*, how his precious minutes waste,—and the vacant *paper* that is still waiting to bear the *imprint* of his mind. His book will afford him the means of acquiring this know-

ledge of his intellectual health and strength; for those wrinkles which his glass, self study, will truly show, of mouthed graves will give him memory; and by his dial's shady stealth, he may know Time's thievish progress to eternity. Look, he exhorts himself, what thy memory cannot retain perhaps, commit to the vacant leaves of this book, this diary of thy innerself, and thou wilt find those children *nursed, delivered* from thy brain for the purpose of taking a new acquaintance of thy mind, i. e. serving as a comparison between thy youthful and thy aged intellect. These offices, i. e. by acting thus, so oft as thou wilt look and compare, will be of profit to thee, and much enrich thy book. If it be insisted upon that these words were addressed to a friend, we shall be justified in mooting the question:—Whether the said friend followed the poet's advice, and did or did not commit what his memory could not contain to these waste blanks? And further, whether the children of said friend's brain did take acquaintance from said friend's mind, and much enrich his book, that is, this book of sonnets? And we may be equally entitled to enquire, whether the vacant leaves alluded to bear the imprint of the poet's mind or that of the assumed friend's? If the poet is not speaking to himself, this sonnet, at any rate, is mere tuneful nonsense.

SONNET LXXVIII.

So oft have I invok'd thee for my muse,
And found such fair assistance in my verse,
As every alien pen hath got my use,
And under thee their poesy disperse.

Thine eyes that taught the dumb on high to sing,
And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
Have added feathers to the learned's wing,
And given grace a double majesty.
Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
Whose influence is thine, and borne of thee:
In others' works thou dost but mend the style,
And arts with thy sweet graces graced be;
But thou art all my art, and dost advance
As high as learning my rude ignorance.

The beauty of his verse, for which he is indebted to the inspiration of his genius, is such that every alien pen has adopted his style, and under the auspices of his genius disperse their poesy. The eyes of his mind which taught the dumb on high to sing, and heavy ignorance aloft to fly, have added feathers to the intellectual wings of the learned. Shakespeare here tells us in plain words that he had in his own time imitators who seized upon those beauties of his genius which were apparent to them. This acknowledgement of superiority is, however, of not much value. His genius is to be proud of that which he, the poet, compiles as being born of and immediately influenced by it.—In others' works the style, by the imitations, is but mended and arts of writing graced by the graces of his mind. But he has no other art than his genius which advances his rude ignorance as high as learning and permeates all his works.—This language is surely plain enough!

SONNET LXXIX.

Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid,
My verse alone had all thy gentle grace;
But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,
And my sick muse doth give another place.
I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
Deserves the travail of a worthier pen;
Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent,
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again.
He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
From thy behaviour; beauty doth he give,
And found it in thy cheek; he can afford
No praise to thee but what in thee doth live.
Then, thank him not for that which he doth say,
Since what he owes thee, thou thyself dost pay.

In the refinement of his self-study, the poet draws a strong distinction between that which his genius inspires, and that which he writes as a man; between the tenour of what flows from his pen, and the form in which it is conveyed. (This distinction winds itself through the whole garland of sonnets, and it is needful to keep it constantly in view.) The measure, rhyme and comparisons in his productions are the work of his mortal self; while the spirit, the essence, the thoughts they contain are the inspiration of his genius, they are the latter itself.—By means of the acute psychological conception, by means of the metaphysical definition of that which the poet comprehends by "*his love*," or *genius*, a new truth may be discovered that will possibly tend to modify our inherited convictions. We are here occupied with an analytical exposition that tasked the mind of a Shakespeare throughout his whole life, which served as

a support to his spirit, and which he dedicated to future and more enlightened ages, hoping that, Psyche-like, it would some day burst its enthralment, and display itself in all its intellectual prefulgency.

The hint in this and the following sonnets of the universality of the being, or essence, which is the theme of these emanations, may be important as a help to further our conception of its true nature, or at least to enter, in some degree, into the conception of the poet. Others too can praise the object of his love; nay, the poet admits (with a jealousy bordering on pain) that the lovely argument of his genius, his inner power, deserves the travail of a worthier pen. Yet what that other poet may invent in praise of his genius, he steals from it, and only pays it back again. He attributes *virtue* to it, and he stole that word from the tendency of true genius, which is the encouragement of virtue; he attributes beauty where it is natural and self-evident; he can afford no praise, but what already lives in his theme. In short, his genius wants no one to speak in its praise, it speaks for itself. Either this is an allusion to some cotemporary poet who wrote in praise of Shakespeare's talent in particular, or of genius in general, or the poet may, at this period, have found the task he had set himself in these sonnets too arduous.—The following number continues in the same strain; but in the next following he cheers himself on with more hopeful words, as prophetic as they are beautiful.

SONNET LXXX.

O! HOW I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your fame:
But since your worth (wide as the ocean is)
The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,
My saucy bark, inferior far to his,
On your broad main doth wilfully appear.
Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat,
Whilst he upon your soundless deep doth ride;
Or, being wreck'd, I am a worthless boat,
He of tall building, and of goodly pride:
  Then, if he thrive, and I be cast away,
  The worst was this—my love was my decay.

THIS sonnet strengthens our surmise that Shakespeare had some great cotemporary in view, and we are inclined to think this could be no other than Edmund Spenser who (in 1590) had published the three first books of his *Fairy Queen* when Shakespeare had just produced his First part of Henry VI, and had probably commenced the second part. Shakespeare waxes faint-hearted when he writes of his genius, knowing that a superior mind employs its name and spends all his might in praise thereof, condemning *him* almost to silence upon the same subject; but he encourages himself with the reflection that, since the worth of this inner-self is as wide as the ocean, affording room for the humblest as well as the proudest vessel, he will nevertheless venture his inferior bark upon the same broad main on which he of tall build and of goodly pride careers. If then this latter thrive, and he be cast away, the worst was this—his

love, his genius was itself the cause. We have mentioned *Spenser* as the other poet referred to in this sonnet. A perusal of the *Fairy Queen*, and a comparison of dates and circumstances will enable the reader to decide whether our supposition is more plausible and reasonable than the assertion that some rival poet is singing with him the praises of his friend, his mistress or his patron.

SONNET LXXXI.

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten:
From hence your memory death cannot take
Although in me each part will be forgotten.
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die:
The earth can yield me but a common grave,
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead;
You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen),
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

The poet here shakes off the moody doubt that oppressed him in the preceding sonnets. If these emanations applied to two different corporeal beings, the one as well as the other must die, and we might, indeed, be led to suppose at a superficial reading, that as the poet asks himself whether he shall live to write the other's epitaph, he certainly had a corporeal being in view; but if this verse is to be, as the poet declares it

shall be, the monument by which his assumed friend's name shall have immortal life, how is it that though the verse is immortal he has allowed the *name* to be forgotten? If he had had a friend present to his mind on writing this sonnet, he would have perceived the absurd contradiction that would arise by keeping the friend's name a secret.—It is plain, the poet is speaking solely to his innerself. The earth can yield me but a common grave, he exclaims, but the tomb of my genius shall be the eyes of mankind. (We take the word "eyes" here to signify intellectual perception.) His gentle verse alone shall give immortality to his inmost being. Eyes not yet created (this we consider to mean not eyes yet unborn but an intellectuality not yet existing) shall over read, and tongues to be your *being* shall rehearse when all the breathers of this world are dead. What meaning has this? It has most assuredly a meaning; but what? Can he intend another, a more intellectually endowed, mankind? He emphasizes these words; he feels they will sound strangely to our ears, and adds as parenthesis: "such virtue hath my pen;" his genius shall live there where intellectual inspiration and perception are most highly developed.

SONNET LXXXII.

I GRANT thou wert not married to my muse,
And, therefore, may'st without attaint o'er-look
The dedicated words which writers use
Of their fair subject, blessing every book.
Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue.
Finding thy worth a limit past my praise;

> And, therefore, art enforc'd to seek anew
> Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days.
> And do so, love; yet when they have devis'd
> What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
> Thou, truly fair, wert truly sympathiz'd
> In true plain words, by thy true-telling friend;
> And their gross painting might be better used
> Where cheeks need blood: in thee it is abused.

SHAKESPEARE again refers to some other poet. The change which takes place in his judgment of that other poet's productions is somewhat striking. As we are inclined to assume by the comparison made between himself as a worthless boat, and his rival as a vessel of tall build and goodly pride, that the poet doubted at times his own ability, and was depressed in mind thereby, so we think to perceive at other times as in this sonnet a sort of irony in speaking of the works of other poets. He here begins by the admission that his genius was not married, i. e. confined to his muse alone, and that it may therefore, without injustice to him overlook, or inspire the writings of others, and bless every fair subject. His genius is as fair in knowledge (science) as in hue (poesy); and inasmuch as its worth is so universal as to be past the praise of his muse alone, it is enforced to seek anew some fresher stamp of the *time-bettering days!* And do so, love; he exclaims, yet when those other poets have devised what strained touches of rhetoric can lend, true genius will best be seen and felt in the true plain words of its true-telling friend, Shakespeare; and their gross painting, their florid pompous words, might be better employed upon subjects that need literary ornament; his genius requires no such adventitious aids.

SONNET LXXXIII.

I NEVER saw that you did painting need,
And, therefore, to your fair no painting set;
I found, or thought I found, you did exceed
The barren tender of a poet's debt:
And, therefore, have I slept in your report,
That you yourself, being extant, well might show
How far a modern quill doth come too short,
Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow.
This silence for my sin you did impute,
Which shall be most my glory, being dumb;
For I impair not beauty being mute,
When others would give life, and bring a tomb.
There lives more life in one of your fair eyes,
Than both your poets can in praise devise.

WE have already observed, that the mood to which Shakespeare gives expression in the sonnets in such a truly natural manner, is different at different periods. Often-times he is bold and cheerful, triumphantly certain of rendering evident the glory of the power that inspires him, then again we see this confidence giving way to doubts and fears which however he again overcomes. The sonnets having been written by fits and starts during the poet's career, must not be taken as a work of art of which we are at liberty to judge according to our aesthetic rules. A psychological analysis can alone determine their main spring.—Shakespeare speaks here of two poets in whose united praises there lives less life than in *one* of the fair eyes of his genius. He must certainly refer by this to particular persons who had selected a subject similar to his for their muse! How is it that the commentators who insist upon that subject

being a corporeal friend or mistress are unable to discover a clue to his or her name? As regards the rival poets, one raises a voice for Spenser, another for Daniel:—while a Mrs. Varnon and an Earl of Southampton are set up as being the compounded loves that inspire both their pens. How is it, that if the other poet *uses* the *name* and Shakespeare promises it immortality, neither the poet can be proved nor the promise fulfilled? But it is not so much our aim to refute the guesswork of others, as to enable the reader to form his own independent opinion, by the internal evidence of the sonnets themselves, whether they were addressed to a friend or to the poet himself. We must however observe, that if, as asserted by the supporters of the vulgar interpretation, these effusions are the true expression of his heart, he could not with unaffected sincerity exclaim:—

> O! how I faint when I of you do write
> Knowing that a better spirit doth use your name—

unless he really did know that some contemporary had used the name of the person he was addressing; say, the Earl of Southampton, Mrs. Varnon or somebody else. The commentators very naturally presume that by the words "better spirit" he must mean either Daniel, Drayton, or Spenser. Well, did Daniel, Drayton, or Spenser select the Earl or the lady or any other likely individual for the subject of their sonnets? If so why can it not be ascertained what the name of the person was, that could so inflame the greatest poets of the age, and more especially he whom they pretend to value so highly for knowledge of human nature, penetration, common sense and so forth? What powerful

charms of mind and body must not that he or she individual have possessed?—Or was it perhaps a mere puppet of the imagination? If so what becomes of the poet's profound, ardent feelings and his heartfelt sincerity? Was the production after all merely a work of poetic art—an imitation of the Italian sonnet, or of Spenser's, or some other poet's? Those who cannot accept our interpretation must accept the *puppet* or shew the name of the person. But if they will insist upon the person, without being able to decide the name, they thereby prove the poet shortsighted, and false to his promise; for his rhyme and his genius have outlived marble and the gilded monuments of princes; — against death and all oblivious enmity his name and his genius do pace forth;—their praises do still find room even in the eyes of all posterity: — not so, however, the *name* of the assumed friend or mistress; — not so, even, a puppet's name:—ergo, there is but one interpretation consonant with the poets' *words* and with *truth;* — the poet was speaking to his innerself—his genius.

SONNET LXXXIV.

Who is it that says most? which can say more,
Than this rich praise, that you alone are you?
In whose confine immured is the store,
Which should example where your equal grew.
Lean penury within that pen doth dwell,
That to his subject lends not some small glory;
But he that writes of you, if he can tell
That you are you, so dignifies his story,
Let him but copy what in you is writ,
Not making worse what nature made so clear,

And such a counterpart shall fame his wit,
Making his style admired every where.
You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
Being fond on praise, which makes your praises worse.

Who that says most in praise of genius can say more than the rich praise it gives by its own manifestation. Lean penury dwells within the pen that to his subject lends not some small glory; but he that writes of you (genius) if he can tell that you are you,—i. e. if genius be evinced in praising it,—so dignifies his story. He has but to follow the bent of his genius, to copy what is written therein, not making worse what *nature* made so clear, and such a counterpart of genius will render his *wit* famous, and make his *style* everywhere admired. Genius to its beauteous endowments adds a curse when founded on praise, that is, when displayed in high-flown, florid phraseology, which makes its praises worse.

SONNET LXXXV.

My tongue-tied muse in manners holds her still,
While comments of your praise, richly compil'd,
Reserve their character with golden quill,
And precious phrase by all the muses fil'd.
I think good thoughts, whilst other write good words
And, like unletter'd clerk, still cry "Amen"
To every hymn that able spirit affords,
In polish'd form of well-refined pen.
Hearing you prais'd, I say, "'t is so; 't is true,"
And to the most of praise add something more;
But that is in my thought, whose love to you,
Though words come hindmost, holds his rank before:
Then, others for the breath of words respect,
Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect.

The muse of Shakespeare maintains respectful silence while others pour out praises of genius in precious phrase by all the Muses filed. It will be seen that the poet in the above, and more particularly in the sonnets immediately following, somewhat extends his view of the nature of his genius. It is a spiritual essence "not married to his muse," and may, therefore, inspire the works of others, but nevertheless he thinks that genius selects a mind to reveal itself, and that mind is his. He has, however, not yet acquired that wealth of words needful to express in precious phrase all that is felt by his inner-self. He thinks good thoughts while others write good words, and he, like unlettered clerk, can only cry "amen" to every hymn that able spirit (suppose we say *Spenser*) affords in polished form of well refined pen. When the poet hears, that is (we may assume) reads the praise of genius by his rival, or master, he says: "'t is so; 't is true and to the highest praise adds something more." We think the reader will agree with us that Shakespeare could hardly *know* that the other poet was praising *his* particular friend or mistress, unless the name or some cognomen by which friend or mistress was generally known, occurred in the writings alluded to. When the poet penned this sonnet, it is pretty clear, that he was in a state of doubt as to how long his genius might remain with him; perhaps this despondency may have been occasioned by the perusal of the XIX verse of Spenser's Mutability, Fairy Queen, Book VII, canto 7.

> As for her (Earth's) tenants, that is men and beasts,
> The beasts we daily see massacred die,

> As thralls and vassals unto men's beheasts
> *And men themselves do change continually,*
> From youth to eld, from wealth to poverty,
> From good to bad, from bad to worst of all.
> Ne do their bodies, only, flit and fly;
> *But eke their minds* (which they immortal call)
> *Still change* and *vary thoughts*, as new occasions fall.

Shakespeare felt that genius inspired him, but why should he have been selected for the inspiration, and for how long? Was the endowment for a time only? And if this time were suffered to pass away without his manifesting the endowment, might he not one day be entirely forsaken by this ethereal fire, and his mind become comparatively starved, cold and cheerless, or at any rate of no greater perceptive power than that with which the ordinary run of mortals are gifted?

SONNET LXXXVI.

> WAS it the proud full sail of his great verse,
> Bound for the prize of all too precious you,
> That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inherse,
> Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew?
> Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
> Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
> No, neither he, nor his compeers by night
> Giving him aid, my verse astonished:
> He, nor that affable familiar ghost,
> Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
> As victors of my silence cannot boast.
> I was not sick of any fear from thence;
>   But when your countenance fill'd up his line,
>   Then lack'd I matter; that enfeebled mine.

WE need scarcely ask the reader whether he thinks that the opening words of this sonnet "*proud full sail*

of his great verse" can apply, in common sense, poetic taste, or proved fact, to any verses written in praise of some friend or mistress by Spenser, or Daniel, or Drayton, or any other poet? The proud full sail of his great verse was bound for the all too precious prize of the Earl of Southampton or Mrs. Varnon! And did this the ripe thoughts inherse in the brain of a Shakespeare, making their tomb the womb wherein they grew? Was it his spirit by spirits taught to write of Mrs. Varnon and the Earl of Southampton above a mortal pitch that struck Shakespeare dead? No, neither he, nor his compeers by night giving him aid, astonished our poet's verse: He, nor that affable familiar ghost that nightly gulls him with intelligence, are the cause of his silence. Shakespeare was not sick of any fear from thence; but when the Earl of Southampton's countenance or that of Mrs. Varnon filled up Spenser's, or that other poet's line, then lacked Shakespeare matter;—that enfeebled his muse. Instead now of the noble earl and the fine lady, suppose we substitute Spenser's Prince Arthur as the Poet, and Gloriana as Genius? How sounds the sonnet then? The reader must decide. We read the sonnet thus: Was it the flowing style of his great verse striving after the prize of undying fame in the manifestation of genius that deadened my efforts &c. No, but when I perceived evidence of genius in every line of his, then I doubted my own endowments, my own mundane immortality, as being the only mouthpiece of Nature and poetic Truth. Though Shakespeare here alludes to other poets and the subject that inspires them, he continues nevertheless in the same symbolic

strain as in sonnet XXV. We conceive that Shakespeare, who hitherto describes his genius as especially united to him, here regards it from a more universal point of view; others too may have a share of it, though not in so high a degree as himself.

SONNET LXXXVII.

Farewell: thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
And for that riches where is my deserving?
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
And so my patent back again is swerving.
Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing.
Or me, to whom gav'st it, else mistaking;
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
Comes home again, on better judgment making.
  Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
  In sleep a king, but waking, no such matter.

Utter despair in his own powers, appears to have seized upon the poet's soul. He regards himself as unworthy of the genius with which he believed himself endowed; — he held it but by favour; — and for that wealth of intellect, where is his deserving? The cause of (the expressive ability to display) this fair gift is wanting in him, and so his patent back again is swerving. Genius took up its abode in him, not knowing its own worth or else mistaking him, whom it selected. Thus he has been in possession of his treasure but for a time. In his dreams he fancied himself a king of poets, and is

now awakened to a sense of his inferiority. Under this impression he bids his genius a regretful farewell.

It would seem as if his rival for undying fame had produced a work of no common order; and we are reminded of Sir Philip Sidney's increasing and culminating admiration on reading the Fairy Queen.

SONNET LXXXVIII.

When thou shalt be dispos'd to set me light,
And place my merit in the eye of scorn,
Upon thy side against myself I'll fight,
And prove thee virtuous, though thou art forsworn:
With mine own weakness being best acquainted,
Upon thy part I can set down a story
Of faults conceal'd, wherein I am attainted,
That thou, in losing me, shalt win much glory:
And I by this will be a gainer too;
For bending all my loving thoughts on thee,
The injuries that to myself I do,
Doing thee vantage, double vantage me.
Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
That for thy right myself will bear all wrong.

When thou, Genius, shalt be disposed to set no value on me, and view with scornful eye the little merit I possess, even then I will fight against my individual self in praise of the inner intellectual power, though it has been denied me to the extent I had hoped. The poet being best acquainted with the imperfections of his own nature can justify genius in forsaking him; and in this justification the intellectual power shall win much glory, for by making a subject of his own nature, and failings he will shew by defending genius absent, what

genius present would be; and he by this will be a gainer too; for bending all his loving thoughts upon his inner, his spiritual self, the injuries that he does to his outward self Shakespeare the man, in vantaging his mind, double vantage himself. Such is his love, so entirely does he belong to his genius that rather than its purity, truth, and beauty should be questioned, he would prefer being regarded as an ordinary mind, as one comprehending genius, but not endowed with it. As, since the foregoing commentaries were written, two criticisms of the original have appeared, in one of which the author is termed silly, and in another his work is denominated an "*idle theory*," we shall depart from our intention of referring as little as possible to the vulgar and superficial interpretation of the sonnets. We have given our reading of this sonnet as above, let us see how it sounds to common sense, and how it agrees with truth and poesy, when read according to the conception of our wise mockers. When the Earl of Southampton, or Mrs. Varnon, or somebody else, shall feel disposed to set no value upon the poet, and view his merit with scorn, then, upon his or her side, he will fight against himself, and prove the gentleman or lady virtuous, though he or she is forsworn. The Earl of Southampton, Mrs. Varnon, or some body else, was false, forsworn to the poet; — Shakespeare declares this most unequivocally. He, at the same time, being best acquainted with his own weakness, can set down a story on the part of the lady or gentleman, in which story he will shew so many concealed faults in himself, that the forsworn false lady or gentleman in losing the poet Shakespeare, will win

much glory. And he by this will be a gainer too, for bending all his loving thoughts on the scornful, the forsworn, and yet to be proved virtuous and glorified patron or mistress, the injuries, that he does to himself in vantaging the gentleman or lady will doubly vantage himself. Such is the poet's love for the gentleman or lady, that for his or her right, he will bear all wrong. Which of the two interpretations does the reader choose? In both we have used the poet's own words. The question is, which makes the better sense?—We think it will be admitted, that according to our allegorical acceptation, the sonnet is both profound and poetical; — according to the vulgar notion, it is plainly prosaic and absurd. The poet, we read, regards himself as merely the earthly personality, the medium, by which his genius, his idolized treasure, reveals itself, and conveys its nature-truths to mankind. We might extend the allegorical scope of this sonnet, and assume, that when his genius should be freed from all materiality conjoined with the human instincts and affections of the man Shakespeare, it would be a gain of glory in the sense of Schiller words:

Bis der Gott, des Irdischen entkleidet,
Flammend sich vom Menschen scheidet,
Und des Aether's leichte Lüfte trinkt.

'Till the God his earthly coil off shaking,
Heav'n-ward soars, from Man leave taking,
And the light ethereal air imbibes,

SONNET LXXXIX.

Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
And I will comment upon that offence:
Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt,
Against thy reasons making no defence.
Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill,
To set a form upon desired chance,
As I'll myself disgrace: knowing thy will,
I will acquaintance strangle, and look strange;
Be absent from thy walks; and in my tongue
Thy sweet beloved name no more shall dwell,
Lest I (too much profane) should do it wrong,
And haply of our old acquaintance tell.
For thee, against myself I'll vow debate,
For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost hate.

SONNET XC.

Then, hate me when thou wilt; if ever, now:
Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
And do not drop in for an after loss.
Ah! do not, when my heart hath scap'd this sorrow,
Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe;
Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
To linger out a purpos'd overthrow.
If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
When other petty griefs have done their spite,
But in the onset come: so shall I taste
At first the very worst of fortune's might;
And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
Compar'd with loss of thee, will not seem so.

It is evident that at the period when above two sonnets were written, the poet was suffering from some "spite of fortune," and if the friend or mistress could forsake

him, or even evince a disposition to do so at such a moment, he or she was decidedly not worth the poet's pen and ink. Of this, the great analyst of human nature would be aware, and, we should think, not trouble himself much about the loss of such love, the more as it is clear from his own words, that he was not exactly acquainted with the cause of the inconstancy. Besides, there is a palpable contradiction; for in the one sonnet he speaks of the friend or mistress as having already forsaken him; in the other he says: "if thou wilt leave me," &c. If these emanations were nothing more than a literary exercise, an essay of skill in sonnet writing by a fledgling muse it might excite our interest, and induce us to overlook the great ado about nothing as far as the world is concerned, but if these sonnets are to be accepted as an expression of the deepest natural feeling, as all commentators assert, we really must drop the patron and mistress. We can understand the poignant grief of a Shakespeare doubting the constancy of his intellect, through all the troubles, and turmoil, and mutations of life; and if failing health, or the struggle for maintenance had produced an enfeeblement or derangement of his mind the language he employs might spring from his heart, and every expression would be poetically just and true; but Shakespeare, the philosopher poet, could surely not write thus to nor of an Earl of Southampton, a Mrs. Varnon or any other *body*. Let us proceed to the next sonnet.

SONNET XCI.

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
Some in their wealth, some in their body's force;
Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill;
Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;
And every humour hath his adjunct pleasure,
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest;
But these particulars are not my measure:
All these I better in one general best.
Thy love is better than high birth to me,
Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
Of more delight than hawks or horses be;
And having thee, of all men's pride I boast:
Wretched in this alone, that thou may'st take
All this away, and me most wretched make.

The dread of losing his intellectual power by any of the accidents of life excites the reflection of its high value to him. He sets it above all selfish, sensual, relative joys. — His inner-self, — his imagination, — his intellect, or genius is better to him than high birth, richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost; of more delight than hawks, or horses be; and having it, he can boast of all men's pride, that of intellect, which men prize more highly than any thing else. He is only wretched at the thought that this may fade, may take itself away.

Would this be true of a Mrs. Varnon or an Earl of Southampton? Was either of them "all men's pride?" „Poetical license! Poetical license!" exclaims the vulgar superficial critic. But what becomes then of your flourishings about "the Beautiful" and "the True?" If the poet was speaking from his *heart*, he was not speaking to your Mrs. Varnons, nor your Earls of Southampton. Let us see how the next sonnet agrees with the vulgar acceptation!

SONNET XCII.

But do thy worst to steal thyself away,
For term of life thou art assured mine;
And life no longer than thy love will stay,
For it depends upon that love of thine:
Then, need I not to fear the worst of wrongs,
When in the least of them my life hath end.
I see a better state to me belongs
Than that which on thy humour doth depend.
Thou canst not vex me with inconstant mind,
Since that my life on thy revolt doth lie.
O! what a happy title do I find,
Happy to have thy love, happy to die:
But what's so blessed fair that fears no blot?
Thou may'st be false, and yet I know it not.

How does this sonnet read according to the vulgar interpretation? The friend or lady may do his or her worst to steal his or herself away, for term of life he or she is assured the poet's; and his life will stay no longer than the individual's love; for it depends upon that love &c. &c. Poetical license again? Ay! but where is the poetic truth? Where the ease and simplicity of natural feeling? And where is the sense of his being happy to have the "forsworn" individual's love, happy to die? And how could the lady or gentleman be false and yet he know it not when in the preceding sonnets he speaks as if he had some evidence of faithlessness and deplored it? We give the poet credit for more sense and truth than is displayed in such an interpretation; and read the sonnet thus: But should the worst happen; should his intellect change and decay; nevertheless, to all ends and aims of life, it is assured to him; for his

genius is interwoven with his individuality, and life will last no longer than his intellect; because the former depends upon the latter, that is to say, his body, his life is upheld solely by his intellectual force, or, as we say in common parlance, he has a spirit stronger than his body; and were his mind to succumb to age or infirmity, his body would have no stay. Consequently there is no occasion to fear the worst of wrongs, i. e. the utter extinguishing of his genius, when the least of them, that is, the first symptoms of a failing power, would be the signal for the fall of his corporeal frame. He sees that a better state belongs to him than that which depends upon the humour of his genius, that is, he need not be under any apprehension of utterly *losing* his intellectual force, because at times it seems to leave him, "to vex him with inconstant mind," since his mundane existence depends upon this very intellectual power. O! he exclaims, with poetic truth, simplicity and sound reason. O! what a happy privilege do I enjoy in being so happy as to possess thee, my genius, and happy to die; that is, to pass away from the world with his genius. But what is so blessed fair that fears no blot? My intellect may play me false, my judgment may be wrong, and yet I, blinded by self-love, may know it not. He continues this train of reflection in the next sonnet.

SONNET XCIII.

So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband; so love's face
May still seem love to me, though alter'd new;
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:

For there can live no hatred in thine eye;
Therefore, in that I cannot know thy change.
In many's looks the false heart's history
Is writ in moods, and frowns, and wrinkles strange;
But heaven in thy creation did decree,
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;
Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.
  How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
  If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!

Blinded by self-appreciation, he may, even when really forsaken by his intellectual power, imagine himself still in possession of it. The desire and love of meditation may still adhere to him, but the pith, the spirit, the heart may be elsewhere. For no hatred or self-depreciation can exist in his inner-self, in the eye of his mind. Therefore he cannot discover the dreaded change in his intellectual ability or genius, through that mind. In man's countenance or looks, the false heart's history is writ in moods, and frowns, and wrinkles strange; but heaven in creating genius or intellect did decree, that in *its* face sweet love should ever dwell &c.— By the words: "thy face" we understand his *art*, the creative principle or representing faculty of his mind. Whatever may be the thoughts or the inner heart's working of his mind, its representations to himself as well as to others should tell nothing but sweetness. How like Eve's apple doth its beauty grow, if it be not as sweet as pleasing and encouraging to him inwardly as it shows itself to the world!

SONNET XCIV.

THEY that have power to hurt, and will do none,
That not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die;
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity;
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds:
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

THE current of thought, expressed here, flows from the concluding exclamation of the preceding sonnet: "How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow if thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!" And if those who are endowed with the intellectual power to hurt mankind and will do none; if they do not the things they represent, if they who moving others by the creations of their minds are themselves as stone unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow; they rightly do inherit heaven's graces, and are the guardians of what is beautiful, true, and natural; they display the evil consequences of distorting the natural instincts, of turning them into mere pleasure and pastimes. They are the lords and owners of their faces, that is, having their art—their creations—in their control,—others are but stewards of their excellence. Genius is to its productions what the summer's flower is to the summer; if that flower the

essence of the mind, meet with base infection, if corrupted, if it misapply its powers and beauties to evil, the basest production out-braves its dignity; for the finest creations of the mind, if tending to encourage vice and wrong, are worse than the vilest productions. "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds." Would this sonnet be poetical or true if addressed to the individuality of Mrs. Varnon or the Earl of Southampton?

SONNET XCV.

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name?
O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!
That tongue that tells the story of thy days
(Making lascivious comments on thy sport)
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise;
Naming thy name blesses an ill report.
O! what a mansion have those vices got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee,
Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,
And all things turn to fair that eyes can see!
Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege;
The hardest knife ill us'd doth lose his edge.

This sonnet, too, would be simple and unmitigated absurdity if taken in any other sense than as reflections of the poet upon his own art, genius, or intellectual skill in representing the creations of his imagination. The above, though connected in idea with the two preceding sonnets, seems to have been written some time later. The poet here criticises his own works, and exhibits a foresight of that which others might consider objectionable therein. In the preceding sonnets

he speaks of genius in its widest sense, in this sonnet he concretes it as it were in his own self. We understand him to say: That his genius even embellishes those faults which spot the beauty of its budding name, that is, its public appreciation. O! he exclaims, in what sweets dost thou thy sins (against art, or truth, or propriety let us say) enclose! That tongue of criticism which tells the story of his intellectual or dramatic days, making lascivious, i. e. either lustful arbitrary, malicious, comments on what was written in mere sportiveness, cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise, the fame of his genius, that is, the naming of his name by commentators will command a hearing for their ill reports, for their fault-findings. O! what a mansion have *those* vices got which for their habitation chose out his art to shew themselves, where the veil of the *Beautiful* covers every *blot*, and turns all things fair that merely meet the eye. But he warns his genius to beware of this large privilege; for the hardest knife *ill* used doth lose its edge. We think to perceive in these views of Shakespeare respecting his own art the key to much of that which seems uncouth and coarse in his works. Gervinus was not far off from the discovery of the true cause of this peculiarity of Shakespeare's muse when he remarked, that wherever the poet made a slip it was nevertheless always found, on close inspection, to be the slip of a master-mind.

This is one of the sonnets which, at first sight, seem least like allegory; but who that grants the poet to have been a clearheaded man, and who that knows by his works how thoroughly he detested the hyperbolical, can imagine him saying: "How sweet and lovely dost thou, my friend

or my mistress, make the shame, which, like a canker in the fragrant rose, doth spot the beauty of thy budding name? O, in what sweets dost thou, my friend or my mistress, thy sins enclose! &c."—Perhaps it will be said, this was the style of the day! But Genius is superior to style. Besides, even for mere rhymsters, license is ruled by common sense and propriety; and where could be either in the above sonnet, if it were addressed to a Mrs. Varnon or an Earl of Southampton?

SONNET XCVI.

Some say, thy fault is youth, some wantonness;
Some say, thy grace is youth, and gentle sport;
Both grace and faults are lov'd of more and less:
Thou mak'st fault graces that to thee resort.
As on the finger of a throned queen
The basest jewel will be well esteem'd,
So are those errors that in thee are seen
To truths translated, and for true things deem'd.
How many lambs might the stern wolf betray,
If like a lamb he could his looks translate!
How many gazers might'st thou lead away,
If thou wouldst use the strength of all thy state!
But do not so; I love thee in such sort.
As thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

Taken in the concrete sense this would flatly contradict some of the preceding sonnets, and leave us in doubt whether it was addressed to a friend or a common strumpet; besides puzzling us sadly to discover how *those errors* seen in the friend or mistress could be translated to truths *and deemed true things*. But if we read it in the abstract sense, all becomes clear, and

beautiful, and true. Some critics say the fault of his genius, or his dramatic art, is youth, some wantonness; some say its *grace* consists in that very youth and gentle sportiveness. Both grace and faults are more or less loved by the world; and the faults will prove graces to those that make a study of his poetic creations. As on the finger of a throned queen the basest jewel will be well esteemed, *so* are those errors which are observable in his genius, (i. e. in his works, the offspring of his genius) interpreted or translated to truths, and deemed for true things, that is to say, his genius is judged by the *letter* and not by the spirit. The power his genius gives him is great, for how many might be corrupted if the letter of his productions were *saintly* and the *spirit* of them *evil.* How many simple gazers and superficial readers might his genius lead away, if it would use the strength of all its state! "But do not so, my genius,"—exclaims the noble poet-philosopher,—"do not so misapply thy power;—I love thee in such sort, as thou being a part of me, *mine* is thy good report."

SONNET XCVII.

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen,
What old December's bareness every where!
And yet this time remov'd was summer's time;
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease:
Yet this abundant issue, seem'd to me
But hope of orphans, and unfather'd fruit;

For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 't is with so dull a cheer,
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

SONNET XCVIII.

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him:
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew:
Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you; you pattern of all those.
Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play:

SONNET XCIX.

The forward violet thus did I chide:—
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my love's breath? the purple pride
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells,
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.
The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair:
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red nor white, had stolen of both,
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;

> But, for his theft in pride of all his growth
> A vengeful canker eat him up to death.
> More flowers I noted, yet I none could see,
> But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee.

THE three last sonnets appear to be a prelude to a new series upon the same subject, or rather, as we have already named these effusions, a continuation of his soul's diary. A considerable period may have elapsed between the composition of XCVI, XCVII and ensuing sonnets. The poet complains of his absence from his genius; that is to say, he had discontinued his self-communion, or he had ceased from all literary labour, which must have been to him the pleasure of the fleeting year, witness the amount of labour displayed in his compositions. What an intellectual coldness, and barrenness, and darkness he has remarked in himself during the period he was removed from the subject of his Muse! Yet that period was the summer of his life, the teeming autumn, big with the rich increase of poetic and worldly experience, acquired in the heyday of youth, now to be used after that imaginative youth had passed away; still this abundant issue of his mind seemed to him but hope of orphans and unfathered fruit; for he thought his genius had forsaken him for ever.

In these three concluding sonnets, the poet, as if aware that the allegory had gradually become too transparent, endeavours to obscure it by concreting the image. The personification is thus rendered so consistent as to admit of the vulgar and superficial interpretation to a similarly slight and vague extent as in the opening sonnets I, II, III. Having thus carefully veiled his subject he concludes the series. With sonnet C a new series

begins. A pause occurs, as if he had been intellectually weary. Although we are inclined to think that the last three sonnets form a prelude to the ensuing, yet it is plain from the first lines of C, that some time had elapsed. Regarding C as the first of the new series, we shall preface it by a few observations.

The exclamatory burst with which the poet animates himself to a fresh effort, would lead us to suppose, that it was at first his intention to conclude with the ninety ninth sonnet, if not with the ninety sixth. Be this as it may, a change of feeling is clearly perceptible in this sonnet. The poet has evidently been in a state of doubt and wavering as to his productions. Here, however, he braces himself up to a renewed effort to convey to posterity the secret thoughts of his heart. Did he set *too* great a value upon his endowments in thus imagining that after generations would feel an interest to know what he felt and thought? We think not!—and from the very fact that we, nearly hundred years removed from him, and in a foreign land, are at this moment entirely and exclusively occupied with him and endeavouring to comprehend him. This very fact justifies his self-appreciation and proves his divining penetration and thorough knowledge of his own self, of his own art, of his own language, and of mankind. He foresaw that he would be regarded as the inaugurator of a new era in the art dramatic, that he would be to ancient classic poesy, what Bacon is to ancient philosophy. And in mentioning the name of Bacon, we cannot help being struck at the positive similarity of stamp apparent in the writings of these two men,—a similarity so wonderful

to our mind, that Bacon might have written the works of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare those of Bacon. It may be objected in our comments upon each separate sonnet, that we have done little more than enfeebled the text by a dry and prosy recapitulation. To such an objection we can only reply that we found it often difficult to say more than we had already said in the introduction, namely, that the subject of the sonnets was the poet's own innerself, the living principle, the mainspring of his muse. We admit that we have been frequently puzzled to give the poet's meaning in other words than his own. His diction is so acute, so logical; his words, so suited to the idea, that no other words at our command could better express his sentiments, than those he himself employs. We cannot argue the reader into accepting our interpretation,—he must penetrate the allegory and comprehend the true meaning through the medium of his own feelings, of his own innerself. Of and to the intellectual innerself the poet speaks, and by the intellectual innerself alone can he be understood. Besides, it lies in the nature of such abstract delineations, that the one reader will comprehend this, and another that sonnet easier. Many a passage which appeared, even after a careful perusal, dark to us, will be clear at the first glance to another; and, on the other hand, a passage which was easily understood by us, may cost another person some labour to penetrate. Where a doubt arises as to the real drift of a sonnet, it will be found in no way to affect the general sense according to our reading;—the doubtful passage may be passed over for a second or third perusal;—other

sonnets will help to clear up the doubt. Shakespeare's sonnets must be studied like his dramas. Their inmost depths and beauties cannot be spontaneously perceived and appreciated but by a spirit, wholly, or at any rate in some degree, equal to Shakespeare's. At the same time, even the casual, hasty reader who adopts our interpretation, will discover profundity and beauty enough in the sonnets, to repay the perusal, and closer study.

In attempting further to elucidate the continuation of what we think we have appropriately termed a Diary of Shakespeare's innerself, we beg the reader always to keep in view the utter improbability of so great a mind as Shakespeare's wasting its precious and well-perceived transitory powers, upon trifling amorous love ditties; and also to remember, that so profound and voluminous a writer as Shakespeare, who passed from life in the prime of manhood, must necessarily have been constantly occupied with the profoundest studies of men and books.—To attain to the astonishing command of his own language which Shakespeare possessed, would require a life of study by a man of ordinary ability even now. How astounding is his wealth of words and grammatical correctness!—and how laboriously must it have been acquired at a period when no dictionary of the language existed! Though Shakespeare was a genius, he must have been a hard working man; and time, consequently, most precious to him. We may rely upon it that no friend, no mistress could ever have infatuated him to such a degree as to extort so mysterious, continuous, and time-filching an attention. Nor let us forget that a great poet's subject must in itself be great.

SONNET C.

Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long
To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?
Spend'st thou thy fury on some worthless song,
Darkening thy power to lend base subjects light?
Return, forgetful Muse, and straight redeem
In gentle numbers time so idly spent:
Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem,
And gives thy pen both skill and argument.
Rise, resty Muse, my love's sweet face survey,
If Time have any wrinkle graven there:
If any, be a satire to decay,
And make Time's spoils despised every where.
  Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life;
  So thou prevent'st his scythe, and crooked knife.

The poet calls upon his Muse to speak of that which gives it all its might. Now, that which inspires his Muse, that which lives in his works can surely be no *person*, but his *genius!* He asks himself,—as indeed the world would ask such a man:—"Spendest thou thy "fury on some worthless song, darkening thy intellectual "power to lend base subjects light?"—Though an Earl of Southampton might not be an absolutely *base* subject for his Muse, yet a dubious, if not forsworn friend, or a Mrs. Varnon was certainly not a *fit* subject. But, no, the poet encourages himself to renewed confidence in his *genius*, and calls upon his Muse to survey his love's sweet face, his works, and see whether Time have graven any signs of decay in his powers; if any, then let his sonnets be a satire upon it, and make Time's spoils be everywhere despised. His Muse shall give his genius fame faster than Time wastes life; and thus defeat his

scythe, and crooked knife. If the word "*wrinkle*" was intended to apply to the face of a friend or mistress, in what way has his Muse proved a satire to decay? And how has it given "*fame*" to the individual, when, according to the vulgar reading, he has left the world in doubt as to whether the party was a man, or a woman, or a jumble of both sexes?

SONNET CI.

O TRUANT Muse! what shall be thy amends,
For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed?
Both truth and beauty on my love depends;
So dost thou too, and therein dignified.
Make answer, Muse: wilt thou not haply say,
"Truth needs no colour, with his colour fix'd;
Beauty no pencil, beauty's truth to lay;
But best is best, if never intermix'd,"
Because he needs no praise, wilt thou be dumb?
Excuse not silence so; for't lies in thee
To make him much out-live a gilded tomb,
And to be prais'd of ages yet to be.
Then, do thy office, Muse: I teach thee how
To make him seem long hence as he shows now.

THE poet condemns himself for having mistrusted his genius, as we have seen he did, and neglected his most worthy subject so long. His genius is truth and beauty combined, both depend upon the manifestation of his genius, and so likewise does his Muse,—and therein he is dignified. He might excuse his silence upon the subject of his genius by saying that Truth and Beauty once displayed require no argument, no comment, but are their own witness,—their own and sole criterion. But though his genius *needs* no praise, it is the task of

his Muse to transmit proofs of it's having inspired the man Shakespeare, to excite the admiration of after ages, and exhibit to them how genius displayed itself in his time.

We have nothing to remark upon this sonnet beyond directing attention especially to the second, third, and the concluding lines in which latter the poet makes the subject of his Muse *masculine*. We would ask the reader whether the words: "Both truth and beauty on my love depends" addressed by one man to another accord with custom, propriety, truth or poesy? We find nothing in the works of Shakespeare, or any of his contemporaries that would justify the assertion that it was the custom of the time for friends to address one another in more tender terms than young men address their sweethearts now. If the poet compared his masculine friend to every thing that was sweet and beautiful,— we must assume that sonnet XCIX, in which he speaks of his love's sweet breath, soft cheek, violet blue veins, lily hands &c. is *likewise* addressed to the same masculine friend, at any rate we cannot discover by any pronoun, either in XCIX or in the sonnets preceding it and connected with it in sense, whether the poet really had a female in view. Our reading of the sonnets in the order they have come down to us and as they here stand shows a perfectly natural and consistent concatenation of ideas, making the whole a unity. The inner sentiment is clearer than the outward figures employed by the poet—a most striking peculiarity in these sonnets. We must rest satisfied with directing the attention of the reader to this, and leaving him to form his own opinion.

SONNET CII.

My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear:
That love is merchandiz'd, whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish every where.
Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops his pipe in growth of riper days:
Not that the summer is less pleasant now,
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burdens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
  Therefore, like her, I sometime hold my tongue,
  Because I would not dull you with my song.

This sonnet, too, tends to confirm the belief, that, at the time when the poet composed this and the immediately preceding sonnets, he was no longer a young man. He says, that though he does not display so great an enthusiasm for his genius, he loves it no less. His love for this personification of his innerself is deep and lasting; he does not sing its praises to exhibit his poetic ability, but merely for his own satisfaction and encouragement. It is a love not to be merchandized, rich as he esteems the object. This may serve to explain the supposed fact that he did not publish the sonnets himself, but left them to find their way into the world by their own merits, or by his reputation. The love expressed in his earlier sonnets was new, but in its spring; he used then to greet it with his lays, as the nightingale the flush of summer; not that his ripened imaginative powers afford him less inward delight now, but, that

his genius has been productive, and his works are replete with the harmony of nature; consequently that tumult of the soul which ensued upon the first discovery of his poetic faculty has been calmed down, and sweets grown common lose their dear delight. Therefore he sometimes abstains from dwelling exclusively upon his genius, because he would not dull it with his song in its praise alone. We might proceed farther with the abstraction, but we have said enough here for our purpose. Accepting the vulgar interpretation we should have to suppose that the poet had recovered the affections of the former "forsworn" friend or mistress, and that the summer of their love was not less pleasant than the spring. But the "wild music" and the "sweets grown common" would induce the surmise, that the friend or lady had been influenced by sonnet I; — had granted the increase desired "from fairest creatures," had pitied the world, and made no waste in niggarding. This sounds absurd indeed; but it is not *our* interpretation.

SONNET CIII.

ALACK! what poverty my muse brings forth,
That having such a scope to show her pride,
The argument, all bare, is of more worth,
Then when it hath my added praise beside.
O! blame me not, if I no more can write;
Look in your glass, and there appears a face,
That over-goes my blunt invention quite,
Dulling my lines, and doing me disgrace.
Were it not sinful, then, striving to mend,
To mar the subject, that before was well?

For to no other pass my verses tend,
Than of your graces and your gifts to tell;
And more, much more, than in my verse can sit,
Your own glass shows you, when you look in it.

AGAIN and again the poet recurs to the sentiment that all he can say and sing in glorification of the power that inspires his Muse is unsatisfactory to himself. His genius having such a subject as its own self to display its beauty, natural truthfulness, and power, ought to be greater in the sonnets than in any of his other productions; but his genius must not blame him if he no more can write; for when he contemplates the nature of this inner being there appear features that surpass his blunt invention, dulling his lines and disgracing him. Were it not sinful then to mar the subject that before was well and had proved itself in his other works? For to no other pass his verses tend than to tell of the graces and gifts of his intellectual inner-self; and his own silent contemplation shows more, much more, than he can put in verse.

This is another of the sonnets which at the first glance seems to admit of only one, and that the vulgar interpretation, and indeed in favour of the lady; for, even if it were the custom to speak in tender, effeminate terms to male friends, one man would not tell another to look in his glass to study his beautiful face; but the poet says, his *argument* all bare is of more worth than his added praise; now the difficulty for critics has been to discover what the argument really was,—whether *love* in general, or the love of a lady or a gentlemen in particular.

SONNET CIV.

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were, when first your eye I ey'd,
Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold
Have from the forests shook three summers' pride;
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd,
In process of the seasons have I seen;
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.
Ah! yet doth beauty, like a dial hand,
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived;
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,
Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived:
    For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred—
    Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

The Beautiful as displayed by his genius can never be old, that is, false or hateful, if he may judge by the fact that he has discovered no alteration in his imaginative power since first he become conscious of the endowment. Three years he had already been occupied with the analysis of his mind; and though he once fancied his Muse would soon be exhausted in its flights and sink to earth, he begins now to think that his fears were unfounded. Nevertheless as the dial hand steals from the figure without the movement being perceived; even so may the force or beauty of his genius be waning, while he is flattering himself that it is as fresh and green as ever. For fear that his own judgment may play him false he exclaims:—"hear this, "thou age unbred—Ere you were born was beauty's "summer dead."

SONNET CV.

Let not my love be call'd idolatry,
Nor my beloved as an idol show,
Since all alike my songs and praises be,
To one, of one, still such, and ever so.
Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence;
Therefore, my verse to constancy confin'd,
One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
Fair, kind, and true, is all my argument,
Fair, kind, and true, varying to other words;
And in this change is my invention spent,
Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.
  Fair, kind, and true, have often liv'd alone,
  Which three, still now, never kept seat in one.

How the poet strives to convince us of the sincerity of his enthusiasm for the subject of his Muse! His sonnets generally, and this one more especially, evince the inspiration of real feeling. Knowing how dark the allegory is, he expresses the hope that we shall not call his love idolatry, nor conclude from his verses that what he adores is a vain idol, a fiction.—The reader will bear in mind that the words "fair," "kind," and "true" are thoroughly synonymous with "the *beautiful,*" "the *good,*" and "the *true;*" the abstracts in fact of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness in the modern ethical sense. His genius is ever the advocate of the Good, ever constant in that wondrous excellence, and his verse, constant to unvarying Goodness, is at the same time singing the praises of Truth and Beauty which are interwoven with it; and these three themes, in one, afford a wondrous scope. Beauty, Goodness, and Truth have indeed often lived

singly in other poets, but never before did they exhibit themselves united in one, as in his genius. Is this exaggerated self-esteem, or is it nothing more than the acknowledged truth? Does not Shakespeare's genius exhibit Goodness, Truth, and Beauty combined? The poet perceived what posterity has discovered. He shows himself as great in his knowledge of his inner-self, as of human nature in general.

SONNET CVI.

WHEN in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of ladies dead, and lovely knights;
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
And for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
  For we, which now behold these present days,
  Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

WHEN he sees the characters drawn in the chronicles of the ancients,—when he views the perfections delineated in the classic mythology, then in this their personification of the highest Beauty he perceives that their antique pen would have expressed even such a Beauty as that which is now the subject of *his* Muse—a genius, which, combined all the perfections, Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, in one. So all the praises of the ancients are but

prophecies of the poet's time, prefiguring his genius; and though they looked with divining eyes they had not skill enough to sing the worth of the great intellectual inner-self of man and nature. He, too, though in his self-analysis he comprehends this power, lacks words to praise it.

Plainly as the poet declares himself to be the only possessor of this inspiration,—the genius of his sonnets,—he thinks to see in the works of the ancients a perception that they were aware of what was wanting in their works, and of what would be displayed in his, the beauty of nature unadorned by any art and therefore gaining for him, the man Shakespeare, the fame of the highest art. Whether the poet refers here to the ancient poets of Greece or Rome, or to a Dante and a Petrarch, as he speaks of the praises of "ladies dead," we leave to the reader. Those poets, unable to comprehend their inner conceptions of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, proved, that the genius which inspired them was imperfect. That which Shakespeare would exhibit in his sonnets is a spiritual essence which may in different degrees of power animate man, but which he, alone, felt and appreciated in all its force.

SONNET CVII.

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Suppos'd as forfeit to a confin'd doom.
The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;

Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
Now, with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrant's crests, and tombs of brass are spent.

No subject so common place as the love towards a friend or mistress could have imparted such a glowing,—such an impressive burst of feeling as is displayed in this sonnet. In what way can the last four lines apply to any being but himself? We leave it, without further comment, to the reader.

SONNET CVIII.

What's in the brain that ink may character,
Which has not figur'd to thee my true spirit?
What's new to speak, what now to register,
That may express my love, or thy dear merit?
Nothing, sweet boy; but yet, like prayers divine,
I must each day say o'er the very same,
Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,
Even as when first I hallow'd thy fair name.
So that eternal love, in love's fresh case,
Weighs not the dust and injury of age;
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,
But makes antiquity for aye his page;
Finding the first conceit of love there bred,
Where time and outward form would show it dead.

It is evident that this sonnet is linked with the sonnets immediately preceding:—the concatenation of ideas is clear enough; and, in our sense, no confusion exists as to sex, there being no question of it; but according

to the vulgar reading it would be hard to make this sonnet agree with those preceding it; for, as we have already remarked, the terms employed in them could with propriety refer only to a female, whereas in this sonnet the poet expressly makes the party masculine, calling his love a "sweet boy." To make this sonnet accord in the vulgar sense with the preceding sonnets it would be necessary indeed to transpose the verse,—making an "*Olla podrida*,"—a "*Cento*" of the poet's work in fact, as a certain translator has really done.

What's in the brain that ink may character, exclaims Shakespeare pursuing the train of ideas expressed in CVIII, which has not figured to thee; that is, personified, my true spirit or inspiring essence? What is there new to say, what has he now to write beyond what he has already written that could better exhibit his ardent enthusiasm for, and the high merit of his genius—of that inner power, which astonished the man Shakespeare himself as much as it astonishes us? Nothing! (The poet admits that his human pen is not forcible enough to delineate all his sublime conceptions and vast range of subjects.) But yet, like the prayers we address to the Supreme Being, he must each day say o'er the very same: His genius appertains to him and he to his genius in the same inseparable co-existence as when he first hallowed its fair name. His everlasting love, in this second phase of his mortal life, as now displayed in this second series of sonnets, is superior to the wear and tear of humanity. The first germ of the enthusiastic perception of his genius burst into life where time and outward form would show it dead.

SONNET CIX.

O! NEVER say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seem'd my flame to qualify.
As easy might I from myself depart,
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie.
That is my home of love: if I have ranged,
Like him that travels, I return again,
Just to the time, not with the time exchanged;
So that myself bring water for my stain.
Never believe, though in my nature reign'd
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stain'd,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;
For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my Rose; in it thou art my all.

THE first line of this sonnet refers again to the interval during which he left his genius unsung, that is, thought less of his inner-self, and perhaps more of the applause of the groundlings of his time. Though this forgetfulness seemed to qualify his devotion to Truth and Nature, yet as easy might he from himself depart, as from his soul which dwelt in the breast of his genius. We need scarcely ask the reader whether if the six last lines were addressed to a human being the effusion would bear the stamp of heartfelt admiration or love? If sincere it would be little else than blasphemy, if not, then the most mouthing fulsomeness. Could the sum of good concentrated in any friend or mistress induce a Shakespeare to declare from his heart that this wide universe was as nothing in comparison? So preposterous Shakespeare could indeed never be. In touching, here, upon his wanderings from his genius, may he not refer

to intellectual labours which were written for mere amusement or profit?—Possibly comedies penned or concocted for the public of the day,—labours which he considered worthless.

SONNET CX.

Alas! 't is true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view;
Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new:
Most true it is, that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays prov'd thee my best of love.
Now all is done, save what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A god in love, to whom I am confin'd.
Then, give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
Even to thy pure, and most most loving breast.

This sonnet offers, we think, sufficient internal evidence that the "absence" spoken of by the poet was an intellectual, not a corporeal absence. Shakespeare confesses, that during the period he discontinued the converse, as it were, with his inner-self, he committed faults which he would otherwise have avoided. He had gone here and there, he had made himself a *motley* to the *view,* gored his own thoughts, looked on Truth askance and strangely. He had neglected the dictates of his inner-self and gratified in his works the taste of the multitude, degrading his intellect to suit the low comprehension and wishes of the public of the day:—

But, he declares,—by all above, those blenches gave his heart another youth; those worse essays of his intellect proved his genius to be the best of all, and from whose inspirations he will never again permit himself to stray. Therefore he implores his genius to welcome his return to the bosom of the pure, the truthful, the natural.

SONNET CXI.

O! FOR my sake do you with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds:
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand:
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand
Pity me, then, and wish I were renew'd,
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysel 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
Nor double penance, to correct correction.
Pity me, then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
Even that your pity is enough to cure me.

THE cause of his harmful deeds, of the degradation of his intellectual powers, was the want of fortune. He had no other means of living than by catering to the public. His genius should therefore chide Fortune the guilty goddess of his deviations from his inner-self. Thence it comes that his fame receives a brand, and his nature is subdued to what it works in like the dyer's hand. From this we may conclude, that, but for his penury, Shakespeare might have embodied his thoughts

in other forms besides dramas. Thus in all his works, these sonnets excepted, he was forced to keep the public pleasure in view. Hence he regards these effusions as more particularly his own, and values them accordingly, as we have seen in sonnet LV.

SONNET CXII.

Your love and pity doth th' impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;
For what care I who calls me well or ill,
So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow?
You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
To know my shames and praises from your tongue;
None else to me, nor I to none alive,
That my steel'd sense or changes, right or wrong.
In so profound abysm I throw all care
Of other's voices, that my adder's sense
To critic and to flatterer stopped are.
Mark how with my neglect I do dispense:—
  You are so strongly in my purpose bred,
  That all the world besides methinks they are dead.

The love and pity of his genius obliterate the brand which vulgar scandal stamped upon his brow; what cares he about the judgment of others as long as he feels in his inner-self that he is justified. His genius is all the world to him; and by and through his own intellect,—which is there, not to be taught by the blind world, but to teach,—he must know his failings, and his merits. He is deaf to flatterers, as well as to cavillers. "Mark," he exclaims to his genius, "you are so interwoven with the purpose of my life that the whole world seems dead to me." This is then the point of view

from which Shakespeare regards his productions. His supreme ego, his inner-self, his own self-sentient, superior volume of mind is his sole judge; the opinion of his cotemporaries is of no worth. Is this vanity, and self-conceit? Not a whit! Simple truthful self-perception! Shakespeare is the father of modern poesy, as based upon nature, that is upon what we see, and hear, and feel, just as Bacon is father of modern natural philosophy, and Sydenham of modern natural medicine. As in the mind's eyes of the two last, all past, and cotemporary philosophers and physicians must have seemed, and truly were, mere talkers and plagiarists, even so must Shakespeare have regarded all preceding and cotemporary dramatists. But we see that even this most just self-appreciation is hidden by the veil of allegory, which we are so venturesome as to attempt to draw aside. And indeed had the poet lent an ear to the criticism of his time, in what mazes of folly might not his gigantic mind have expended and lost itself.

SONNET CXIII.

SINCE I left you mine eye is in my mind,
And that which governs me to go about
Doth part his function, and is partly blind,
Seems seeing, but effectually is out;
For it no form delivers to the heart
Of bird, of flower, or shape, which it doth latch:
Of his quick objects hath the mind no part,
Nor his own vision holds what it doth catch;
For if it see the rud'st or gentlest sight,
The most sweet favour, or deformed'st creature,

The mountain or the sea, the day or night,
The crow or dove, it shapes them to your feature:
  Incapable of more, replete with you,
  My most true mind thus maketh mine untrue.

The sentiment conveyed in this sonnet appears hardly in unison with that expressed in the two immediately preceding, for the poet speaks here as though he were still absent from the subject of his muse, whereas in the foregoing sonnets we see he had returned to it. It strikes us that he is becoming aware of a fresh cause of anxiety — the danger of self-deception, of self-flattery. He has touched upon this once before in sonnet LXII, where he says: "Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye, and all my soul, and all my every part." It is clear the poet makes a very trenchant distinction between his genius and his understanding. Since he forsook the former his eye is in the latter, and this eye which guides his judgment is divided in its function, and is partly blind; it seems to see, but has in effect lost its clear-sightedness; and all the objects upon which his imagination seizes, are not delineated as they are in themselves, but are transformed into something that coincides with his notions of art, or of popular appreciation and perception. His mind's eye shapes all things, good and bad, according to the feature of his genius, that is, the ideal of his imagination. He is capable of no more than this, and replete with his genius, his *most true* mind, makes thus his own judgment untrue.

SONNET CXIV.

Or whether doth my mind, being crown'd with you,
Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery?
Or whether shall I say, mine eye saith true,
And that your love taught it this alchymy,
To make, of monsters and things indigest,
Such cherubins as your sweet self resemble,
Creating every bad a perfect best,
As fast as objects to his beams assemble?
O! 't is the first: 't is flattery in my seeing,
And my great mind most kingly drinks it up:
Mine eye well knows what with his gust is 'greeing,
And to his palate doth prepare the cup:
If it be poison'd, 't is the lesser sin
That mine eye loves it, and doth first begin.

A continuation of the idea expressed in the sonnet preceding this, and tending to confirm our acceptation. The poet is in doubt whether his being, filled with the excellency of his genius, which is his most true mind, does not dazzle and blind his understanding or whether doth his mind, he says, being crowned with his genius drink up the monarch's plague *this flattery?* He probes the cause which leads him to make of common every day beings such perfect creations. Is it mere self-flattery, or is his eye, his human judgment, correct, and does its perception of the true and natural, in contra-distinction to the falsely exaggerated and unnatural of the ancient dramatists, proceed from the inspirations of that inner-self, that genius of his which took up its abode in him, he knew not how or wherefore, unless, as he declares in sonnet I, it was to be the herald to the blooming spring of a new, fresh, and natural literature.

O! he exclaims, it is the *first* surmise,—it is self-flattery, and his *great* mind, that is, the crown of his mind, his genius most kingly drinks it up. His eye, his mind, well knows what suits his taste, and to his palate prepares the cup. If this self-appreciation, this self-flattery, as he fears, be poison, it is the lesser sin that his eye, the mind of Shakespeare the man, loves it, and doth first begin. Whatever opinion the reader may form of our interpretation of this sonnet, he must allow, that to apply the sentiments to a friend or mistress would be simply to reduce them to jingling syllables.

SONNET CXV.

Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
Even those that said I could not love you dearer;
Yet then my judgment knew no reason why
My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer.
But reckoning time, whose million'd accidents
Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings;
Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents,
Divert strong minds t' the course of altering things:
Alas! why, fearing of time's tyranny,
Might I not then say, "now I love you best,"
When I was certain o'er incertainty,
Crowning the present, doubting of the rest?
  Love is a babe, then, might I not say so,
  To give full growth to that which still doth grow?

The first line of this sonnet refers to the first ninety nine sonnets. He had then no reason to presume that his intellectual power would acquire greater developement;—on the contrary he thought it had reached its acme, and he feared its subjection to the tyranny of

Time. Could he think that his genius would prove even more fruitful and glowing in the decline of life than it was in his youthful prime? Had he not reason, rejoicing in the present possession, and doubtful of the future, to say his genius was dearer to him then than it would even be in later life?

SONNET CXVI.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments: love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempest, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

The concluding lines of sonnet CXV excites in the poet's mind a train of thought upon love in the abstract which he pursues in this. We have only to remark here that the last line will bear two readings;—either, he never writ, nor was any man ever loved by him; or, he never writ, nor did any man ever love another man or woman. We take the first to be the poet's meaning; and if this be correct, we may assume that he employed the words "no man" in preference to the more indefinite *no one,* because the object of his devotion, his genius,

was masculine in his conception; and therefore he always personifies it as a friend. This is another of those sonnets which, as it unequivocally defines loving constancy, and therefore seems to favour the vulgar interpretation, we must leave the reader to form an independent opinion as to whether it in any degree affects the stability of our position.

SONNET CXVII.

Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all
Wherein I should your great deserts repay:
Forgot upon your dearest love to call,
Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day;
That I have frequent been with unknown minds,
And given to time your own dear-purchas'd right;
That I have hoisted sail to all the winds
Which should transport me farthest from your sight:
Book both my wilfulness and errors down,
And on just proof surmise accumulate:
Bring me within the level of your frown,
But shoot not at me in your waken'd hate,
  Since my appeal says, I did strive to prove
  The constancy and virtue of your love.

His genius may accuse him that during the time of his absence or forgetfulness, he had neglected to fulfil its dictates, that he had trusted for subjects to the works of uninspired writers, had written for his age only, instead of for all generations, and had followed the humour of the public which should transport him farthest from that delineation which would be true in every age and nation. Let his wilfulness and errors be noted, and on these proved errors, let surmise from

generation to generation accumulate. By thus deviating from the path marked out for him by his inner-self, he has deserved the frowns of his genius, i. e. that his intellectual power should lose its elasticity and facility of conception and expression; but he hopes the wonderful and inexplicable gift will not be utterly taken from him, since his appeal says that he strove to prove the constancy and virtue of its preference for him.

SONNET CXVIII.

Like as, to make our appetites more keen,
With eager compounds we our palate urge,
As, to prevent our maladies unseen,
We sicken to shun sickness when we purge;
Even so, being full of your ne'er-cloying sweetness,
To bitter sauces did I frame my feeding;
And, sick of wellfare, found a kind of meetness,
To be diseas'd, ere that there were true needing.
Thus policy in love, t' anticipate
The ills that were not, grew to faults assur'd
And brought to medicine a healthful state,
Which, rank of goodness, would be ill be cur'd;
 But thence I learn, and find the lesson true,
 Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you.

This refers to the period when he imagined his genius had forsaken him or might decay with his bodily powers. Even then, being full of the never-cloying sweetness of his inner-self, he fed his imagination on bitter subjects, and under a mistaken impression that his inspiring essence was leaving *him* he forsook *it*. But he learnt, that to go beyond his inner-self in search of the true and natural in poesy was like seeking to assuage his thirst at poisoned fountains.

SONNET CXIX.

WHAT potions have I drunk of syren tears,
Distill'd from limbecks, foul as hell within,
Applying fears to hopes, and hopes to fears,
Still losing when I saw myself to win!
What wretched errors hath my heart committed,
Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never!
How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted,
In the distraction of this madding fever!
O benefit of ill! now I find true,
That better is by evil still made better,
And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
So I return rebuk'd to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent.

THIS sonnet bears the stamp of profound emotion, excited by some real or fancied self-deception. It is evidently connected in sentiment with the preceding sonnet; but what Shakespeare means by the syren tears distill'd from limbecks, foul as hell within, of which he drank, we cannot presume to explain with any degree of confidence. Did he, doubting his own genius, his own most truly self-perceived superiority, endeavour to establish an undying fame by following the beaten track of those poets who had preceded him? And did he, on discovering his error, return to, and rely upon the inspiration of his own intellect to become, what he is, the father of the drama which is based upon the truthfulness of nature,—not upon the imitation of the ancients?

SONNET CXX.

THAT you were once unkind befriends me now,
And for that sorrow, which I then did feel,
Needs must I under my transgression bow,
Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd steel.
For if you were by my unkindness shaken,
As I by yours, you have pass'd a hell of time;
And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
To weigh how once I suffer'd in your crime.
O! that our night of woe might have remember'd
My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits;
And soon to you, as you to me, then tender'd
The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits!
But that your trespass now becomes a fee;
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

THAT his genius once failed him is of advantage to him now. It was his own doubts that caused his sorrow. Had his want of faith in his inner-power continued, it might have been for ever lost to him, and perhaps to mankind. The grief he experienced in the belief that he has over-rated his inner-self, that complete prostration of spirit he endured, may have taught his deepest sense how hard true sorrow hits, and have enabled him to delineate it, and at the same time, by the teachings of his inner-self, to tender the humble salve that heals the wounded bosom. That trespass of his genius now becomes an instruction to him for the future. The errors he committed during his period of mistrust must be made good by the genius displayed in his other productions. He and his genius will thus mutually ransom each other.

SONNET CXXI.

'T is better to be vile, than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being;
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed,
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing:
For why should others' false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am; and they that level
At my abuses, reckon up their own:
I may be straight, thought they themselves be bevel.
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;
  Unless this general evil they maintain,
  All men are bad, and in their badness reign.

The poet here once more recurs to his critics. He cares not whether, in a literary point of view, they think well or ill of him. He protests against their judging his works by their own rank thoughts. This sonnet is clearly an outburst of momentary annoyance, and serves to confirm our supposition that the whole work may be regarded as a poetical diary or note-book of the poet's intellectual life.

SONNET CXXII.

Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
Full character'd with lasting memory,
Which shall above that idle rank remain,
Beyond all date, even to eternity;
Or, at the least, so long as brain and heart
Have faculty by nature to subsist;
Till each to ras'd oblivion yield his part
Of thee, thy record never can be miss'd.

That poor retention could not so much hold,
Nor need I tallies thy dear love to score;
Therefore to give them from me was I bold,
To trust those tables that receive thee more:
  To keep an adjunct to remember thee,
  Were to import forgetfulness in me.

THE poet is drawing the effusions which are especially addressed to his genius to a close. They cease with sonnet CXXVI. He appears in the three last to wind up with a recapitulation of the contents of the whole series. The gift of his genius, the power of conception and expression are within his brain charactered with a memory more lasting than that which belongs to that *idle rank,* i. e. that fast growing weed, that waxes and wanes with the body. That gift shall endure beyond all date, or at least, so long as brain and heart, i. e. mankind, have faculty by nature to subsist, the record of his genius, his works, that is to say, such as were written under the inspirations of his inner-self, regardless of the style and humours of his day, never can be missed. His waning memory could not hold all he felt, nor indeed did he need a tally to score from day to day or from month to month the various emotions excited by the contemplation of his inmost being; therefore he gave them from him to trust those tables (the sonnets) that afforded a vent for his pent up emotions. These tables he will now lay aside: for, to keep an adjunct to remember his genius, to prevent him from again disregarding its dictates, were to import forgetfulness in him.

SONNET CXXIII.

No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
Thy pyramids, built up with newer might,
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
They are but dressings of a former sight,
Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
And rather make them born to our desire,
Than think that we before have heard them told.
Thy registers and thee I both defy.
Not wondering at the present, nor the past;
For thy records and what we see do lie,
Made more or less by thy continual haste.
    This I do vow, and this shall ever be
    I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee.

The poet declares that he will shew himself superior to the influence of Time. He will not permit himself to be deceived by the dressings of a former sight. He knows the world sets a value upon every thing old, not because it is good in itself, but because our time is brief. He will not be led astray by a blind admiration of ancient, or modern writers. He will obey simply the dictates of his own genius, copy nature, and be true despite the mutations of Time. Shakespeare could hardly speak plainer language with reference to his own self than in this sonnet.—If addressed to a friend, or a mistress, the sense and feeling would be too remote from the subject, and the profundity of the reflection altogether out of place.

SONNET CXXIV.

If my dear love were but the child of state,
It might for fortune's bastard be unfathered,
As subject to time's love, or to time's hate,
Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.
No, it was builded far from accident;
It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
Under the blow of thralled discontent,
Whereto th' inviting time our fashion calls:
It fears not policy, that heretic,
Which works on leases of short number'd hours,
But all alone stands hugely politic,
That it nor grows with heat, nor drowns with showers.
To this I witness call the fools of time,
Which die for goodness, who have liv'd for crime.

Were his genius given him but to make a show of, it might, as a transitory ornament of the age, pass away without conferring fame upon him who was endowed with it.—It might be subject to the love and admiration of the present time, and, perhaps, to the hatred and contempt of after ages; a weed among weeds, or a flower among flowers. But, no, his genius was not formed where it could be affected by accident; it suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls under the blast of pent up discontent, although lured on by the behests of the fashion of the time. It fears not wordy trickery, called style or policy, that heretic which works on leases of short numbered hours; for he whose style is the admiration of one age may be the contempt of another. No, his genius stands all alone hugely politic, that is, logical and natural, neither too luxuriant in its ardour, nor to languishing in its sentimentality. To witness this he

appeals to those who have lived and written for the fame of the age in which they lived, thinking that the bad judgment of their day would serve as good for all posterity. Such are, indeed, like death-bed penitents, fools of time who die for an eternity of bliss after having only lived for crime.

SONNET CXXV.

Were 't aught to me I bore the canopy,
With my extern the outward honouring,
Or laid great bases for eternity,
Which prove more short than waste or ruining?
Have I not seen dwellers on form and favour
Lose all, and more, by paying too much rent;
For compound sweet foregoing simple savour,
Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent?
No; let me be obsequious in thy heart,
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no art,
But mutual render, only me for thee.
Hence, thou suborn'd informer! a true soul,
When most impeach'd, stands least in thy control.

Of what avail would it be to him to enjoy the highest honours in his day, or lay great bases for eternal literary fame which prove more short than the waste or ruining of intellectual abilities? Has he not seen dwellers on form and favour lose all, and more, by paying too much for them?—The sentiments expressed in this sonnet are entirely opposed to the vulgar acceptation that the poet had his friend the Earl of Southampton, or indeed any other patron, in view. Could the poet, under the influence of an amorous instinct, or

a fond partiality for a man, employ such a tone of thought, and style of language? With what justice could he term such as dwell on form and favour "pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent," or declare that his oblations to this corporeal friend were not set off by stylish or poetic jargon and void of art? Those who would maintain that Shakespeare is addressing friend or mistress in this sonnet must admit him to be guilty of palpable self-contradiction. Here would be plenty of art, and very little feeling.

SONNET CXXVI.

O THOU, my lovely boy! who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle, hour;
Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st;
If nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
As thou goest onwards still will pluck thee back,
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
May time disgrace, and wretched minutes kill.
Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
She may detain, but not still keep her treasure:
Her audit, though delay'd, answer'd must be,
And her quietus is to render thee.

LET this be read in the vulgar sense of Mr. Bodenstedt and those whom he has followed, and we venture to assert that the poet took a most villanous liberty with the English tongue, or that some emendator has taken great liberties with the poet. We venerate Shakespeare, but our veneration does not go so far as to induce us to accept nonsense for sense. A poem intended to be taken literally by posterity must be written in language

so logical and plain that not a doubt of its meaning can possibly arise. A common man, born and bred on the banks of the Thames requires little or no aid from commentators to understand the vulgar allusions in Shakespeare's plays; indeed the common man might rather enlighten the commentator. Now if the poet used no art in his verse upon so simple and every day a theme as love and friendship, how is it that so much doubt and confusion have arisen as to the *meaning* of the sonnets? If Shakespeare, as he declares, desired to give fame to the subject of his muse why not give the name, and thereby help to fulfil his prediction? He had a fair example in Spenser who in his sonnets, LXXIII and LXXIV, tells the world that Elizabeth was the name of her who was the subject of *his* muse. That name had made him three times thrice happy. It was the name of his mother, the name of his queen, and the name of his love, his life's last ornament. This was plain language. Had Shakespeare, now, wished to confer fame upon *his* corporeal friend or love, why did he not, like Spenser, also give the name? Your answer, Mr. Bodenstedt, who so boldly presume to stigmatise our interpretation as a silly theory in your audacious patchwork translation. We read this hundred and twenty sixth sonnet thus:—O thou, my genius! who art superior to the influence of Time, who hast increased in power as my corporeal being has decreased in strength, and thereby showest the decline of him who adores thee; for with the waning of my body my experience and knowledge waxeth, and so in proportion thou, my genius, growest; if, however, nature, the sovereign mistress, must

sooner or later dim thee, yet now she keeps thee bright, that she may give thee immortality and thus disgrace Time. Yet fear her, O! thou attendant on her pleasure! She may prolong indeed thy stay, but not still keep thee who art her treasure. Her audit, though delayed, answered must be; and with my body thou must likewise depart.

With this solemn warning the poet concludes that portion of the sonnets in which he vented the emotions of his inner-self in the form of an address to his genius. With the hundred and twenty seventh we have a fresh series intimately allied to the former. They appear to be addressed to a woman, such is the general belief, and yet the slightest analysis will suffice to prove the absolute impossibility of their being aught else than a pure symbolical fiction. Were the sonnets amorous effusions, or an ovation to friendship, Shakespeare would hardly have presented them to the world in two different series; for by the unity of his emotions, alone, could he excite our interest in them. But here he proceeds so direct from sonnet CXXVI to CXXVII, and in the same form and manner as in the others, that we cannot conclude so powerful a revolution has occurred in his inner-self, as the transfer of his ardent love from one person to another would imply. Such is, however, not the case; the intellectual and emotional unity of the whole circlet of sonnets is not for a moment disturbed, although the persons are changed. Instead of a second part, or new poem, which would have to begin again with a No. I, he gives us simply an outward distinguishing sign by changing the form of the last sonnet of the

series. After having in one hundred and twenty five sonnets kept strictly to one and the same verse of fourteen lines with alternate rhymes, he gives as a conclusion in the hundred and twenty sixth sonnet only twelve lines with rhymes succeeding one another. It will be observed that sonnet XCIX has fifteen lines. Is this mere whim, or a necessity of rhyme and sense; or did the poet intend it as an outward sign of the conclusion of a period? Having exhausted the one symbol, the poet adopts a second, with the aim to explain by the latter, that which was left dark by the former. The female, his mistress, to and of whom Shakespeare here speaks, is his *Art*, the *Drama*, the sphere in which his genius wrought, the uneared womb in which it shaped its creations.

SONNET CXXVII.

In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame;
For since each hand hath put on nature's power,
Fairing the foul with art's false borrow'd face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace.
Therefore, my mistress' eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited; and they mourners seem
At such, who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Slandering creation with a false esteem:
Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.

The sense of these lines can most assuredly not apply to the external beauty of a woman. The poet speaks

here of his *Art;* he compares it with that of the ancients. It is not hard to guess what he means by the word "black" in contradistinction to "fair." It is the very word that best expresses the difference between Shakespeare's dramas and those of the ancients. In olden time *black* was not considered fair; a work like Richard the Third for instance would not have been accounted fair; Grecian art would never have taken so real, that is to say poetically if not historically real, a subject. But in his day when every hand had misapplied nature's power, making foul fair with the false borrowed face of *Art,* the Beautiful was without a name or dwelling place, no temple, but was profaned if not despised. For this reason, his art is raven black, so suited and seeming to mourn at such, who, not possessing a conception of the true Beautiful yet imagine they have the true when they slander Nature with their false view. Yet his *Art* mourns so becomingly, that every tongue exclaims: "The Beautiful should look so!" We direct the reader's attention to the splendid passage in Lear, Act IV, Scene III, which is related to this in sentiment.

SONNET CXXVIII.

How oft, when thou, my music, music playest,
Upon that blessed wood, whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently swayest
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks, that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand.

To be a-tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips,
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more bless'd than living lips.
  Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
  Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

Our idea that Shakespeare, in this second series, speaks of his *Art* personified, is not rendered absurd even by the singularly concrete comparisons which he has employed in this sonnet; and every reader who has followed us to this point will have no great difficulty in perceiving therein a symbol—a very concrete symbol indeed—but nevertheless a symbol by which the poet veils a deep emotion. "How oft when thou my *Art*, my music, music playest &c. &c. do I envy those jacks, that nimble leap to kiss the tender inward of thy hand whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap, at the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand." If *Art*, as we think, is here the subject, then the intrument may be taken as typical of the stage, or of the public, and the "saucy jacks" we may accept as the actors who nimbly leap to receive that applause which is due to the poet alone. The double sense of the word "jacks," which signifies the notes of an instrument and also actors, accords with our interpretation. Let these enjoy the outward show and passing applause while he rejoices in the inward delight his art affords.

SONNET CXXIX.

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjur'd, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;

Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof,—and prov'd a very woe,
Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.
  All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
  To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

We have termed these effusions an emotional diary; and this sonnet above all others confirms our view. The poet utters a didactic truth, which, though must beautifully and poetically expressed, seems hardly connected with the subject of his muse; and we might say, altogether out of place here.—Taken by itself, some amorous success, disappointment or disgust might have given rise to it, but interlinked as it is, and, as we must assume, by the poet himself, with the other sonnets, it is utterly impossible to consider the word *lust* as bearing here its modern, vulgar, secondary sense. *Lust* in its primary and ancient signification is equivalent to *desire, longing, yearning, ambition.* There is the lusting after *fame* as well as lusting after the *body,* and both lusts, the abstract and the concrete, thoroughly resemble each other in all their phases of excitation, pursuit, attainment, and proved delusiveness. The reader will have remarked, that we have accepted the wording of all the sonnets, as it stands in modern editions, without questioning the possibility of misprints, or the tamperings of superficial emendators. But let it be borne in mind, that all emendations hitherto made by learned commentators, as well as

by printers, have been such as would harmonize with, or impart sense to the concrete and vulgar interpretations. We refrain from disputing the authenticity of a single word, or phrase, first, because an obscure word, here and there, does not affect our interpretation in general, and secondly, because we are not in a position to obtain the author's manuscript, nor even the first editions. This as a hint to those who come after us.

According to our reading, this sonnet is intimately linked in idea with the preceding. In the one he vents his longing for the applause which falls to the lot of those who represent his creations,—for that immediate and personal fame, for that foreseen glorious universal admiration, which now attends his name; and in the other he analyses the emotion and argues its vanity.

SONNET CXXX.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads not the ground;
  And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
  As any she belied with false compare.

The poet soliloquizes upon the reality, the naturalness of his Art. It does not soar above its subjects. The

creatures of *his* Art are drawn from nature. His heroes and heroines are not angels of light, superhuman in strength and spirit, nor are his villains spirits of darkness, monstrous in their craft and crimes. No, *his* Art when she walks, treads on the ground; and he thinks it quite as rare as any that is belied with false compare. What could better distinguish the drama of Shakespeare from that of the ancients than that she is a goddess who, when she walks, treads on the ground?

SONNET CXXXI.

THOU art as tyrannous, so as thou art,
As those whose beauties proudly make them cruel;
For well thou know'st to my dear doting heart
Thou art the fairest and most precious jewel.
Yet, in good faith, some say that thee behold,
Thy face hath not the power to make love groan:
To say they err I dare not be so bold,
Although I swear it to myself alone.
And, to be sure that is not false I swear,
A thousand groans, but thinking on thy face.
One on another's neck, do witness bear,
Thy black is fairest in my judgment's place.
  In nothing art thou black, save in thy deeds,
  And thence this slander, as I think, proceeds.

HIS art is, in its kind, as tyrannous, that is, as difficult, requiring as deep reflection and taste in its management, as the art of those who follow the florid and unnatural ideal Beautiful of the ancients. For the delineation of Nature in its simple purity is the most arduous of all Art, and therefore his Art is to him the fairest and most precious jewel. Yet in good faith some who behold it

say, that it has not the power to depict love-emotions. He will not say they err, although he will swear it to himself alone. And indeed he swears not falsely; for the groans of thousands, who only witness the superficial representation of his Art, prove, that its blackness is fairest. In nothing is his Art black, save in the deeds which it represents, and thence, he thinks, this slander of his Art proceeds.

SONNET CXXXII.

THINE eyes I love, and they, as pitying me,
Knowing thy heart torments me with disdain,
Have put no black, and loving mourners be,
Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain.
And, truly, not the morning sun of heaven
Better becomes the grey cheeks of the east,
Nor that full star that ushers in the even
Doth half that glory to the sober west,
As those two mourning eyes become thy face.
O! let it, then, as well beseem thy heart
To mourn for me, since mourning doth thee grace,
And suit thy pity like in every part:
Then will I swear, beauty herself is black,
And all they foul that thy complexion lack.

THE poet becomes more and more absorbed in the abstract contemplation of his Art. The delineation of its peculiarities is no easy task, even for a Shakespeare. It stands personified before his intellectual vision; he gives it form but without that concreteness with which he would have described a corporeal being. We will not venture to mutilate, by a prosaic analysis, an abstraction which the poet alone could comprehend in all

its force. The reader must bring his own mind to bear upon it. We do not, however, hesitate to declare, and we feel assured that every reader who has felt sufficiently interested to follow us thus far in our comments, will agree with us, that to attribute the emotion, here displayed, to a corporeal mistress would render the sentiments contradictory, out of all harmony with the rest, and, indeed, altogether absurd.

SONNET CXXXIII.

Beshrew that heart, that makes my heart to groan
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me!
Is 't not enough to torture me alone,
But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must be?
Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken,
And my next self thou harder hast engrossed;
Of him, myself, and thee, I am forsaken;
A torment thrice threefold thus to be crossed.
Prison my heart in thy steel bosom's ward,
But, then, my friend's heart let my poor heart bail;
Whoe'er keeps me, let my heart be his guard;
Thou canst not then use rigour in my jail:
And yet thou wilt; for I, being pent in thee,
Perforce am thine, and all that is in me.

Difficult as it now becomes for us to penetrate and elucidate the allegory, it is nevertheless very clear that the friend and the mistress, addressed in the two series, are two individualities, or rather existences, most intimately connected with the poet, and engrossing all his thoughts. But it will be observed that the friend is a greater object of solicitude than the mistress.—This sonnet as much as any tends to confirm us in the idea

that we have to deal with a perfect poetical Triad—the Mind, the Muse, and the Man.—These three in one we believe to be the subject of this mutilated and hitherto misunderstood work. The poet, in the above sonnet, speaks of his own individuality in the same objective manner as of the other two individualities to whom the verses are addressed. He says: "Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken, and my next self thou harder hast engrossed."

SONNET CXXXIV.

So, now I have confess'd that he is thine,
And I myself am mortgag'd to thy will;
Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
Thou wilt restore, to be my confort still:
But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,
For thou art covetous, and he is kind;
He learn'd but, surety-like, to write for me,
Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.
The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take.
Thou usurer, that put'st forth all to use,
And sue a friend, came debtor for my sake;
So him I lose through my unkind abuse.
  Him have I lost: thou hast both him and me;
  He pays the whole, and yet am I not free.

So, now he has confessed that his genius belongs to his Art, or the Mind to the Muse, and that he himself is pledged to her requirements. He will forfeit himself if those demands made upon him by Art will still leave to him his genius to be his consolation. But Art will not, nor does his genius desire to be freed from her

enthralment; for Art claims the most of genius, and this latter is willing to submit &c. His genius he loses by unkindly misusing it. Art has both, he says: "him and me; he pays the whole and yet I am not free."

SONNET CXXXV.

WHOEVER hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,
And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in over-plus;
More than enough am I, that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious,
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou, being rich in *Will*, add to thy *Will* more.
One will of mine, to make thy large *Will*.
  Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
  Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

SONNET CXXXVI.

IF thy soul check thee that I come so near,
Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy *Will*,
And will, thy soul knows, is admitted there;
Thus far for love, my love-suit, sweet, fulfil.
Will will fulfil the treasure of thy love,
Ay, fill it full with wills, and my will one.
In things of great receipt with ease we prove,
Among a number one is reckon'd none:
Then, in the number let me pass untold,
Though in thy stores' account I one must be;

For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold
That nothing me, a something sweet to thee:
  Make but my name thy love, and love that still,
  And then thou lov'st me,—for my name is *Will.*

Having up to this point in our German work added our interpretation to every sonnet, and having, as we think, clearly proved that a unity of sentiment and arrangement exists throughout the entire series, we abruptly broke off, expressing our regret that we were not in a position conscientiously to subject the remaining sonnets to a similar special analysis. We have, however, since this translation was commenced, devoted some time to the further study of these remaining verses; and we are now disposed to think, though we will not yet venture the attempt to prove, that the argument is his *Self-love,* personified like his *Genius* and his *Art.* This is our impression; but we candidly confess that we do not see our way so palpably clear as in the two first series; and we believe the chief cause of our difficulty lies in the fact—the admitted fact—that the poet's words have been altered by certain persons who have set themselves up as judges without any qualification for so high an office. It is one thing to strive to comprehend a great author's meaning, another to twist his sentences, and alter his words to suit our own limited capacities. We will direct the reader's attention to one acknowledged and audacious instance of tampering on the part of an assumed critic:—In our German work sonnet CXLVI commences thus:

Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth,
Fool'd by those rebel powers that thee array,—

We copied this from the best edition of the sonnets we could find, and naturally imagined, that as the words stood, so they were written by the poet; but since this translation went to press, we have discovered that the words "fool'd by" were not Shakespeare's words, but the "happy conjecture, as a certain annotator terms it, of a Mr. Malone. Our angry opponent, Mr. Bodenstedt, the botcher and translator of Shakespeare's sonnets, also commends this alteration, and declares that the original words make sheer nonsense. The sonnet, it seems, ran originally thus:

> Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth!—
> My sinful earth!—these rebel powers that thee array,
> Why dost thou pine within, &c.

Now we would ask the reader, whether the substitution of "Fool'd by," for the exclamatory repetition of "My sinful earth" is justified by sense or poesy? What Mr. Malone means by his "fooled by," we cannot explain; but we perfectly comprehend what the iteration of "My sinful earth" means.—The poet says: Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth—and by the term sinful earth I mean these human instincts, desires, and passions, which set themselves in array against the noble ambition to excel, which check the soarings of the soul, and bind it down to the earth: This is quite plain and clear language, to all men of plain and clear understandings. In the present work we think it fit to reject Mr. Malone's "happy conjecture" and restore the original words of the poet; and we have no doubt that if we could procure the manuscript of the sonnets we should

have many restorations to make which would tend more and more to confirm our interpretation. We are not in a position at present to unveil the allegory of the ensuing sonnets; we must further study them, or, it may be, leave the solution to some mind more penetrating than ours—some mind more akin to Shakespeare's; for, dark as some of these remaining sonnets appear to us, we do not for a moment doubt, that all these effusions refer to the innerself of Shakespeare; and that sooner or later some congenial spirit will fully explain all that we have left dubious.

In the whole chain of ideas here presented to us by Shakespeare, let it be constantly borne in mind that he is speaking to himself alone—that no emotions, external and transitive are here delineated, as is the case in his dramas, but that he is giving us the internal emotional life of his individual self. The argument of the whole series of sonnets is, we think, more especially epitomized in sonnet CXLIV; where he says: "Two loves I have of comfort and despair &c."—Particularly deserving of note is also sonnet CXLVII, where in describing his state of mind he gives utterance to the reflection:—"My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are, at random from the truth vainly expressed;"—

SONNET CXXXVII.

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is, take the worst to be.
If eyes, corrupt by over-partial looks,
Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,
Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
Why should my heart think that a several plot,
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?
Or mine eyes seeing this, say, this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,
And to this false plague are they now transferred.

SONNET CXXXVIII.

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutor'd youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides thus is simple truth suppress.
But wherefore says she not, she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I, that I am old?
O! love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told:
Therefore I lie with her, and she mith me,
And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.

SONNET CXXXIX.

O! CALL not me to justify the wrong,
That thy unkindness lays upon my heart;
Wound me not with thine eye, but with thy tongue,
Use power with power, and slay me not by art.
Tell me thou lov'st elsewhere; but in my sight,
Dear heart, forbear to glance thine eye aside:
What need'st thou wound with cunning, when thy might
Is more than my ov'r-press'd defence can 'bide?
Let me excuse thee: ah! my love well knows
Her pretty looks have been mine enemies,
And therefore from my face she turns my foes,
That they elsewhere might dart their injuries.
Yet do not so; but since I am near slain,
Kill me out-right with looks, and rid my pain.

SONNET CXL.

BE wise as thou art cruel; do not press
My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain;
Lest sorrow lend me words, and words express
The manner of my pity-wanting pain.
If I might teach thee wit, better it were,
Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so;
As testy sick men, when their deaths be near,
No news but health from their physicians know:
For, if I should despair, I should grow mad,
And in my madness might speak ill of thee;
Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,
Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be.
That I may not be so, nor thou belied,
Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide.

SONNET CXLI.

In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note;
But 't is my heart that loves what they despise,
Who in despite of view is pleas'd to dote.
Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted;
Nor tender feeling, to base touches prone,
Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited
To any sensual feast with thee alone:
But my five wits, nor my five senses can
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
Who leave unsway'd the likeness of a man,
Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be:
Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
That she that makes me sin awards me pain.

SONNET CXLII.

Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,
Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving.
O! but with mine compare thou thine own state,
And thou shalt find it merits not reproving;
Or, if it do, not from those lips of thine,
That have profan'd their scarlet ornaments,
And seal'd false bonds of love as of as mine,
Robb'd others' beds revenues of their rents.
Be it lawful I love thee, as thou lov'st those
Whom thine cyes woo as mine importune thee:
Root pity in thy heart, that when it grows,
Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.
If thou dost seek to have what thou dost hide,
By self-example may'st thou be denied!

SONNET CXLIII.

Lo! as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feather'd creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe, and makes all swift dispatch
In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;
Whilst her neglected child holds her in chace,
Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
To follow that which flies before her face,
Not prizing her poor infant's discontent:
So run'st thou after that which flies from thee,
Whilst I, thy babe, chase thee afar behind;
But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind.
So will I pray that thou may'st have thy *Will*,
If thou turn back, and my loud crying still.

SONNET CXLIV.

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel is a man, right fair,
The worser spirit a woman, colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend,
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell:
Yet this shall I ne'er, know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

SONNET CXLV.

THOSE lips that Love's own hand did make,
Breath'd forth the sound that said, "I hate,"
To me that languish'd for her sake;
But when she saw my woeful state,
Straight in her heart did mercy come,
Chiding that tongue, that ever sweet
Was us'd in giving gentle doom,
And taught it thus anew to greet.
"I hate" she alter'd with an end.
That follow'd is as gentle day
Doth follow night, who, like a fiend,
From heaven to hell is flown away:
  "I hate" from hate away she threw,
  And sav'd my life, saying—"not you."

SONNET CXLVI.

POOR soul, the center of my sinful earth!—
My sinful earth!—those rebel powers that thee array—
Why dost thou pine within, and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
  So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
  And, death once dead, there's no more dying then.

SONNET CXLVII.

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease;
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve,
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic mad with ever-more unrest:
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
At random from the truth vainly express'd;
For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

SONNET CXLVIII.

O me! what eyes hath love put in my head,
Which have no correspondence with true sight!
Or, if they have, where is my judgment fled,
That censures falsely what they see aright?
If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
What means the world to say it is not so?
If it be not, then love doth well denote
Love's eye is not so true as all men's: no,
How can it? O! how can love's eye be true,
That is so vex'd with watching and with tears?
No marvel, then, though I mistake my view;
The sun itself sees not, till heaven clears.
O cunning love! with tears thou keep'st me blind,
Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find.

SONNET CXLIX.

CANST thou, O cruel! say, I love thee not,
When I, against myself, with thee partake?
Do I not think on thee, when I forgot
Am of myself, all tyrant, for thy sake?
Who hateth thee that I do call my friend?
On whom frown'st thou that I do fawn upon?
Nay, if thou low'rst on me, do I not spend
Revenge upon myself with present moan?
What merit do I in myself respect,
That is so proud thy service to despise,
When all my best doth worship thy defect,
Commanded by the motion of thine eyes?
  But, love, hate on, for now I know thy mind:
  Those that can see thou lov'st, and I am blind.

SONNET CL.

O! FROM what power hast thou this powerful might,
With insufficiency my heart to sway?
To make me give the lie to my true sight,
And swear that brightness doth not grace the day?
Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
That in the very refuse of thy deeds
There is such strength and warrantise of skill,
That in my mind thy worst all best exceeds?
Who taught thee how to make me love thee more,
The more I hear and see just cause of hate?
O! though I love what others do abhor,
With others thou should'st not abhor my state:
  If thy unworthiness rais'd love in me,
  More worthy I to be belov'd of thee.

SONNET CLI.

Love is too young to know what conscience is;
Yet who knows not, conscience is born of love?
Then, gentle cheater, urge not my amiss,
Lest guilty of my faults thy sweet self prove:
For, thou betraying me, I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's treason;
My soul doth tell my body that he may
Triumph in love; flesh stays no farther reason,
But rising at thy name, doth point out thee
As his triumphant prize. Proud of this pride,
He is contented thy poor drudge to be,
To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side.
No want of conscience hold it, that I call
Her love, for whose dear love I rise and fall.

SONNET CLII.

In loving thee thou know'st, I am forsworn,
But thou art twice forsworn, to me love swearing;
In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn,
In vowing new hate after new love bearing.
But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
When I break twenty? I am perjur'd most;
For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
And all my honest faith in thee is lost:
For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,
Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;
And to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,
Or made them swear against the thing they see;
For I have sworn thee fair: more perjur'd, I,
To swear against the truth so foul a lie!

SONNET CLIII.

Cupid laid by his brand, and fell asleep:
A maid of Dian's this advantage found,
And his love-kindling fire did quickly steep
In a cold valley-fountain of that ground;
Which borrow'd from this holy fire of love
A dateless lively heat, still to endure,
And grew a seething bath, which yet men prove,
Against strange maladies a sovereign cure.
But at my mistress' eye love's brand new-fired,
The boy for trial needs would touch my breast;
I sick withal, the help of bath desired,
And thither hied, a sad distemper'd guest,
But found no cure: the bath for my help lies
Where Cupid got new fire, my mistress' eyes.

SONNET CLIV.

The little Love-god lying once asleep,
Laid by his side his heart-inflaming brand,
Whilst many nymphs, that vow'd chaste life to keep,
Came tripping by; but in her maiden hand
The fairest votary took up that fire,
Which many legions of true hearts had warm'd:
And so the general of hot desire
Was, sleeping, by a virgin hand disarm'd.
This brand she quenched in a cool well by,
Which from love's fire took heat perpetual,
Growing a bath, and healthful remedy
For men diseas'd; but I, my mistress' thrall,
Came there for cure, and this by that I prove,
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.

CONCLUSION.

WITH the foregoing comments, we think to have opened the way to the true comprehension of this great poetic composition, now nearly three hundred years old; and we feel convinced that at some future period, when mankind shall have become more enlightened in psychology, the innermost core of these poetic emanations will be more successfully probed and exhibited. A mind equal to Shakespeare's would seize upon the most abstruse details as easily as the poet conceived them; and sooner or later, all that our essay has left dark and dubious, more particularly the concluding sonnets, will be fully elucidated. That the views we have advanced, as to the true meaning of the sonnets, will appear bold, and, at a superficial glance, possibly very eccentric, we naturally expect. A delusion of so vulgar a nature, as that which has entrapped the literary world with regard to the work, is not to be dispelled by the opinion of a single individual. Those of our readers who coincide with us will find it hard to conceive how any student of Shakespeare's works could have adopted the belief, that a man endowed with a spirit so mighty, so profoundly philosophical, could so forget himself as to devote his time and his genius to the singing of a *liaison* with a fine lady; the more, as such a supposition renders the

whole composition a jumble of emotions, hyperbolical in themselves, and incomprehensible to posterity. These recondite self-contemplations demand too great an intellectual exertion for superficial readers; and being strictly confined to the individuality of Shakespeare they possess rather a special than a general interest.

The wide approval which our first essay, entitled: "Psychological elucidations of Shakespeare's Hamlet," D. B. Storffrich, has met with, from competent critics, leads us to hope, that this present essay will excite the attention of all students of Shakespeare; and, if it do not obtain acquiescence, that it will, at least, be thought worthy of refutation. We claim to be judged by the poet's own words—these alone are for us the criterion as to the erroneousness, or correctness of our views. We have not been led to undertake this publication from the desire to produce a novelty, but solely to display what we think the poet intended to convey to posterity by his singular, and, hitherto, uncomprehended work.— If we have erred, by the sonnets our error must be proved. We have striven to comprehend objectively the self-worship of an intellectual power, without allowing ourselves to be affected or deterred by any traditional or aesthetical considerations. This work of Shakespeare's being altogether unique, will ever remain open to dispute. We have termed it a song of self-worship; but it is so veiled by the allegory that the poet is safely and for ever protected against the charge of undue self-appreciation; and we only, who endeavour to lift the veil, expose ourselves to all the ridicule and condemnation that would attend such daring self-praise, so opposed

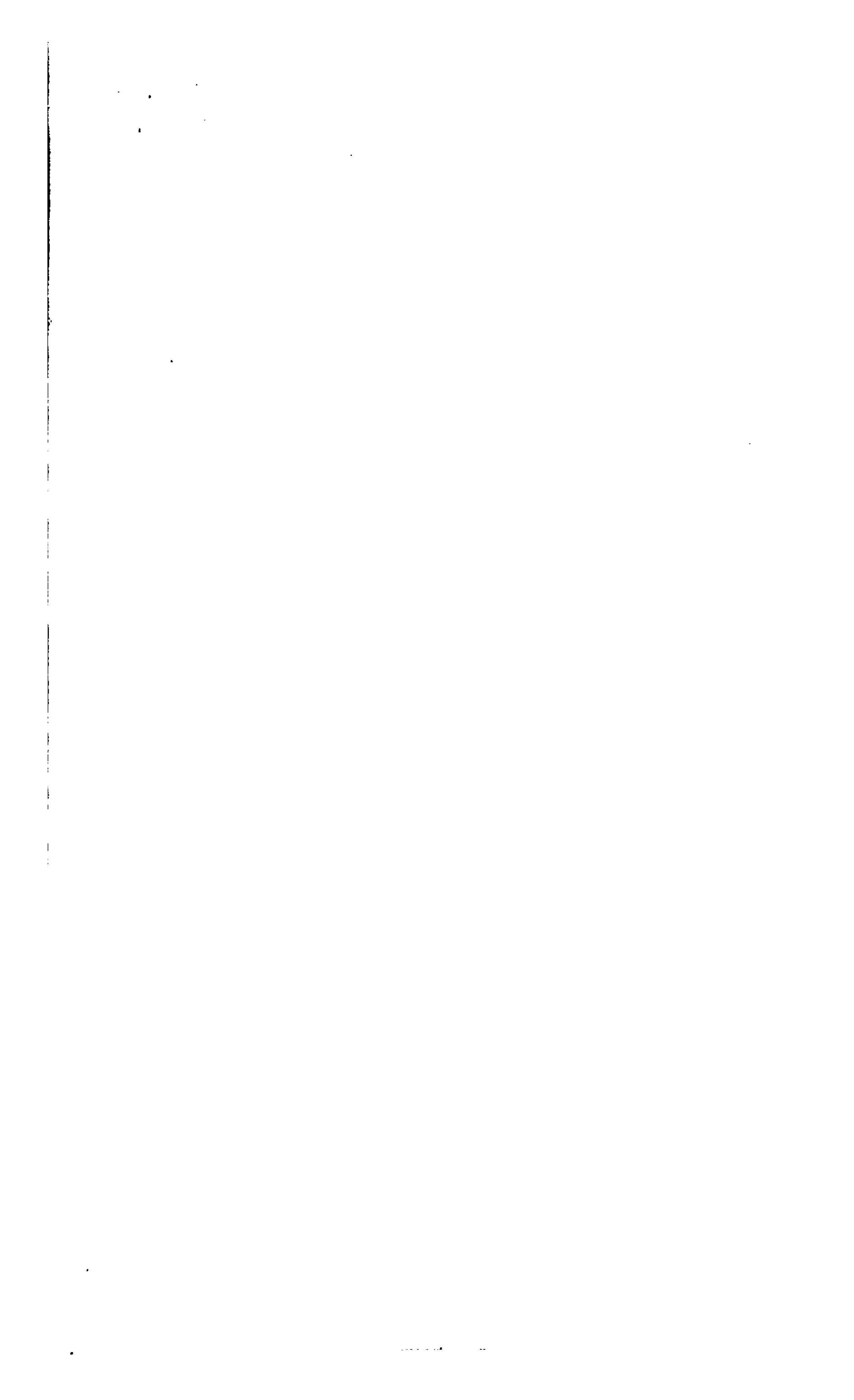
to the affected modesty of the world. The poet, wrapped in his allegory, as in a coat of darkness, has allowed the same searching truthfulness to guide his pen in this delineation of his inner-self, as in his dramatic compositions. But even had he scorned allegory, and spoken plain language, in praise of his genius and his art, what would it have proved, but his just appreciation of his superiority? He is now, after the lapse of almost three centuries, acknowledged to be, by the whole literary world of Europe, the prince of poets—the world's fresh ornament and herald to the blooming spring of modern literature. Had he, therefore, extolled his genius, in the most unequivocal prose, he would be justified by the universal admiration which has been excited by the study and the comprehension of that genius.

Whether the interpretation which we have given to the work is really the sense which the poet intended to convey, must be left to the understanding—to the unbiassed feelings—of the reader. We say the whole series of sonnets form an allegorical poem; and we, for our part, are fully convinced that the inner sense, which we have discovered and exhibited, is more lucid, more logical, more consistent, and more in accord with the masculine mind of Shakespeare, than the *outward* sense, hitherto accepted. Our analysis displays, instead of artistically arranged and very equivocal love ditties, a curious psychological poem.

BREMEN: Printed by F. C. Dubbers.

ERRATA.

Page 7, line 7, after the word *and,* omit the comma.
- - - 8, - - - *effusions,* - - -
- 13, - 28, for subjects, read *subject.*
- 44, - 23, - postery, - *posterity.*
- 63, - 19, after *circumstance,* omit the comma.
- 65, - 9, - *he,* - - -
- 81, - 12, for partizens, read *partizans.*
- 86, - 1, after *certain,* supply *as.*
- 109, - 8, for anothers, read *authors.*
- 141, - 21, - Schiller, - *Schiller's.*
- 160, - 1, - it's, - its.
- 205, sonnet CXXXIX, line 8, for ov'r-press'd, read *o'er-press'd.*



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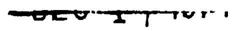

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